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Allen

UNDER SEALED ORDERS

A Novel

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

'THE TENTS OF SHEM,' 'THE DUCHESS OF POWYSLAND,'

'THE SCALLYWAG,' ETC.



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UNDER SEALED ORDERS

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE COURSE OF BUSINESS.

MR. HAYWARD smiled inwardly when, a day or two later, he received a formal note, couched in the third person, stating that Madame Mireff would be much obliged if Messrs. Mortimer and Co. would kindly appoint an hour between eleven and one o'clock on Monday next for her to sit for her photograph. What an amusing *rencontre*, to be sure, between those two in such a relation! It would interest him to watch how Madame

was doing her work, and what presence of mind she might display under peculiar circumstances.

He had heard, of course, from Owen of Madame's meeting with the Cazalets at Lady Beaumont's; and his first remark to his young friend, when Owen mentioned their interview, was a fervent exclamation :

‘I hope you didn't betray any repugnance to her at first sight, as one of the tyrant's instruments? That's immensely important. You must learn above all things, Owen, when you come to mix with that hateful world, to suppress all overt signs of the repulsion it begets in you.’

‘I don't think I did, Mr. Hayward,’ Owen answered truthfully. ‘In fact, I rather flatter myself I managed to keep my feelings perfectly under control. My face was a mask. And besides, she talked so nicely, and seemed in many ways so Russian, that to some extent, after a time—it may have been very

wrong, but do you know, I almost liked her.'

Mr. Hayward's brow darkened a little. This was bad hearing in its way. Had he succumbed so readily?

'She's a very insinuating woman,' he murmured in reply; 'and on that account the more dangerous. Remember always in this world the influence of women is a thing every noble cause has to fight against strenuously. I don't say they're always banded against every good thing; our own society has received some of its greatest aids from the devotion, the heroism, the self-sacrifice of women. In their place, they count for much. But still, they're a disturbing element in many ways, Owen—a disturbing element. Often they undermine principles that nothing else on earth could conceivably undermine. You know, my boy, I don't mean to preach to you; I was never a humbug; and, as always, I prefer to let your individuality have free

play for itself. But if ever you see anything more of Madame Olga Mireff, I would say to you as a friend, regarding you now as a fellow worker and enthusiast for the Cause, my advice is just this: Keep clear of entanglements, were it for practice' sake only. Don't begin letting women twist you once round their fingers. The habit of yielding to them grows with indulgence: it's instinctive in our virility from Adam downwards. Even Samson gave way, and his story's a parable of the Strong Man for all time. What no force can overcome, no hostile power destroy, a woman's will can get over all too easily. . . . And now, are you going back this afternoon to the Red Cottage ?

Owen blushed as he answered, with transparent truthfulness :

' Yes ; but I'm going first to take tea at the flat with Ionê and Sacha.'

Mr. Hayward held his peace. That ill was too deep for words, a harm no preacher could

heal. He could only hope and wish Owen might be delivered from so great a temptation. After all, individualism must have the fullest scope. We can but guide and direct.

‘And we Nihilists at least,’ he thought to himself with a stifled sigh, ‘have no ground to go upon if we are not in all things consistent individualists.’

So, at the appointed hour, when Madame Mireff was to visit the studio, Mr. Hayward, already divining the cause of her visit, and too confident of his own strength not to disdain weak subterfuges, made the running easy for her by setting out on his table three or four of his Morocco views, with Owen conspicuously posed as an accessory in the foreground.

Madame Mireff arrived to the minute, and was shown up at once, viâ the lift, to the upper chamber, very high and glass-roofed, where Mr. Hayward presided over the mys-

teries of his art, as Mortimer and Co., of Bond Street.

They took a good stare at one another, those two, as a preliminary investigation, each noting many small points in the other's external characteristics, before either spoke. Then Madame Mireff said sharply :

‘Are you Mr. Mortimer himself? because I want this photograph to be particularly good; and if it's a success you can expose copies of it for sale in the shop-windows.’

She was enough of a celebrity to venture upon that bribe. All London was talking just then of the beautiful, cunning Russian and her mysterious influence over Lord Caistor's policy.

Mr. Hayward smiled a quiet smile of superior knowledge as he answered, with something of his grand society manner :

‘I'm the nearest approach to Mr. Mortimer that exists. I'm the head of the firm; but it's a trade name only. There's no Mortimer now

in the concern at all. My name is Lambert Hayward. I'll take your portrait myself, if you'll be good enough to sit down there,' waving her with one lordly sweep of his left hand into a vacant chair. 'And, what's more, it'll be taken just fifty times better than any other photographer in London can take it.'

Even Madame Mireff was half over-awed by the imposing dignity of his presence. Such an operator as this she had never before seen. She seated herself passively in the chair, and let him pose her as he would with his stately courtesy. Mr. Hayward arranged her hands and her draperies with self-respecting deference, as a court painter of noble birth might arrange the attire of an empress who was sitting to him.

'Now, a thought more to the left,' he said at last, drawing a screen on the glazed roof over her head, so as to let a pensive light fall delicately on that too exuberant bust—for he had a true artist's eye for effects of light ;

‘look about here ; that will do ! ah, so—exactly. I’m venturing to pose you now, first as Madame Mireff the diplomatist, the *dame de la haut politique*, the friend and ally of ambassadors. You look it to perfection. After that, I’ll try to catch you as Madame Mireff, the leader of gay society in Petersburg ; and then as Madame Mireff, the dreamer, the enthusiast.’

At the last words Madame’s expression altered slightly—and, quick as lightning, Mr. Hayward withdrew the cap and then shortly replaced it again.

‘That was just what I wanted,’ he said, a little triumphant ; ‘that *intriguée* expression, as of one searching in spirit the explanation of an enigma. It’s so you must look, Madame, when you play the high game of diplomacy with our guileless English statesmen—keen to detect their weak points, quick to scent the approach of any dangerous topic. That’s why I said to you just then the word—

“enthusiast.” It was to make you wonder how a photographer in a Bond Street shop ever came to suspect such a trait in your complex character.’

Madame looked up this time in naïve surprise. The assistant meanwhile had slipped in another plate.

‘There, so,’ Mr. Hayward cried again, lifting one warning little finger. ‘Don’t alter a muscle—a thought! Don’t stir, please, or change expression! Ah, capital! capital! That’s the bland, childlike smile of the perfect hostess. It’s as you must have looked in the Governor’s palace at Tiflis. Now again, please. Head thrown back a little more. Eyes looking up—yes, there! Less of the figure this time! More of the face and the neck! Think of Russia and the Cause you have nearest at heart in your country. Think of the Slavonic enthusiasm of your earliest dreams! Think of your Czar, of your Empress! Forget yourself—and me—and this

murky London ! Go back to Petersburg in your own soul—to Moscow—to Novgorod !

Madame sighed half involuntarily. What did *he* know of the Cause she loved really best ? And if he knew what would he think of it, that cold, unsympathetic Englishman ? The thought reflected itself in her face, and, like an electric flash, Mr. Hayward fixed it. He replaced the cap with the sense of a work well performed.

‘There, we have the three Madame Mireffs,’ he said, stepping back and releasing her ; ‘politician, *grande dame*, self-effacing patriot. And all, as you see, in rather less than ten minutes !’

Madame let her breath go free after the suspense of the sitting. What a curious man he was, to be sure, this photographer ! Even *she* felt half afraid now to tackle him about Sacha and Owen. He seemed to see through her so—touched such chords so easily ! She talked for a minute or two with him on neutral sub-

jects; then in a casual way she moved over to the table. As her eye fell on Owen in the Atlas group she gave an almost imperceptible start, but Mr. Hayward noted it—noted, too, that she should have been proof against such betrayal of her feelings—and remembered it afterwards.

‘Why, that’s young Cazalet!’ she cried, drawing back. ‘Owen Cazalet! I know him.’

‘Madame knows everybody,’ Mr. Hayward answered, smiling. ‘Owen Cazalet’s a young friend of mine. He went with me to Morocco.’

Madame gazed hard at the portrait. It was admirably characteristic. Slav, Slav to the backbone. Then she ventured to play a bold card.

‘He reminds me of an old friend of mine,’ she said slowly, as she looked at it. ‘In Petersburg, long ago. The same eyes. The same big build. The same open expression.’

He might almost be a son of Count Sergius Selistoff's.'

'You think so?'

Those cold eyes were fixed coldly upon her.

Madame Mireff flinched.

'Yes, very like him,' she answered, musing.

There was a long, deep pause. Then Madame looked up with engaging frankness, and asked as innocently as a child :

'Is he Russian by origin?'

Mr. Hayward stroked his chin and regarded her in silence. At last he went off at a tangent :

'I've travelled a bit in Europe,' he said, 'and I know my way about the Continent. I've visited Petersburg. I remember the name you mention. There's a General *Alexis* Selistoff there—a head of the Third Section. . . . I suppose you know him. . . . No doubt this Count Sergius Selistoff was the General's brother. . . .' He paused a moment. Then

he broke in upon her fiercely, with a sudden lowering of his head between his shoulders and a quick clenching of his fists. 'And do you think, *Madame l'Espionne*,' he cried, in a low voice between his teeth, 'if these were really Sergius Selistoff's children, I'd give up the fact to an emissary of the Czar's and a creature of their uncle's at the Third Section?'

Madame Mireff drew back, wholly abashed. She was a woman, after all, and tears rose quick into her eyes.

'You English will believe any evil on earth of a Russian,' she murmured low, half remorsefully.

'Then, you mean them no harm?' Mr. Hayward said, drawing back and scanning her close from head to foot.

'Heaven help me, no!' Madame faltered, losing her presence of mind for a moment at this unexpected attack. She seemed to hesitate one instant; and Mr. Hayward noticed her hesitation with a disapproving eye. 'It's

so hard,' she gasped out slowly at last, 'to be always misunderstood. The girl herself—Sacha they call her—misunderstood me the other day. It's painful when one really wishes to do anyone good——' She broke off with a half-scared look. 'Oh, we women are too weak!' she cried in genuine distress. 'Too weak for our work. Too weak for such employment.'

'I think so,' Mr. Hayward assented with a cold, half-contemptuous sneer. 'Olga Mireff, you are tried in the balance and found wanting. This is not what one would expect from Nicolas Sergueyeff's daughter!'

Madame started again, still more visibly. She was completely unnerved now. She clasped her hands in her astonishment.

'Why, what do you know of my father?' she exclaimed, all aghast at such omniscience.

Mr. Hayward came close to her, seized her wrist in his hand, and addressed her in Russian.

‘Olga Mireff,’ he said, looking hard at her, ‘you’ve been a useful friend of the Cause ; but you’ve lost your head to-day. This is dangerous, very. Make no more inquiries at present about these young Cazalets, I tell you. You had no orders to meddle with the matter from headquarters, and this is a headquarters affair. You’ve ventured to push yourself in where you were not needed, and you must abide the result. This interview between us shall be reported at once to Ruric Brassoﬀ.’

At that name Madame Mireff gasped for breath.

‘Ruric Brassoﬀ!’ she repeated, appalled. ‘Then, you’re one of us?’ in Russian.

For it was even so. The dear friend of the Czar, the trusted tool of General Selistoff, the unaccredited envoy to the English Cabinet—was herself a Nihilist. And it was for the sake of the good she could do the Cause that she consented to play in outward show the hateful game of the tyrant’s diplomatist.

But Mr. Hayward only gazed back at her with unaffected scorn.

‘And you think me as weak as yourself, then!’ he answered. ‘You think I wear my heart on my sleeve! You think I’ll bare my bosom to the first person that asks me! Olga Mireff, this is bad. You hold your cards ill to expose their faces. You must answer for all this to Ruric Brassoﬀ.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NIHILIST CHIEF.

It was with profound trepidation that Madame Mireff opened next morning, in her luxurious rooms at the Métropole, a letter with a penny stamp on it, bearing the Ealing postmark. For the address on the envelope she saw at a glance was in the handwriting of Ruric Brassoff's secretary, and she felt sure the mysterious photographer in Bond Street must already have related her indiscretions of yesterday to the head of the organization. And Ruric Brassoff himself, as every Nihilist knew well, was not a man to be trifled with.

'OLGA MIREFF,' the letter said shortly in

Russian, 'I learn from a faithful friend that your conduct of late has seriously imperilled several schemes for the good of the Cause which I have much at heart; and I feel so convinced of the paramount necessity for explaining to you the evil tendency of your inconsiderate action that I have determined to make an exception to my general rule, and to grant you at last—what you have so long desired — a personal interview. Call on Saturday next, at four precisely, at the same place where you spoke with a brother of ours to-day, and ask to see Mr. Hayward, who will conduct you to my presence.

‘Yours for Russia,

‘RURIC BRASSOFF.’

And this was Tuesday! Oh, cruel, cruel delay! Had Ruric Brassoff, she wondered, arranged it so on purpose? Good subordinate as she was, and duly trained to obedience, Madame Mireff said many hard things in her own heart mean-

while about that inexorable chief, who had given her four such days of suspense and misery. She had longed to meet him again for years, and now -- why, now she dreaded it. How difficult it was even to pretend to listen with interest to Lord Caistor's long-winded anecdotes of the turf, or Lady Beaumont's vapid society stories, with that appalling interview hanging over her head all the while like the sword of Damocles! How difficult to dine out, and smile, and smirk, and sparkle, and fascinate, with the letter at her heart and blank terror in her soul! Oh, remorseless chief! Oh, pitiless organization!

At last, however, the dreadful Saturday came, and, with what resolve she could muster up, Madame Mireff drove round in her comfortable brougham to Mortimer and Co.'s in Bond Street. 'To see Mr. Hayward,' she said shortly, without another word to the frizzy-haired young woman in waiting in the

office, and she was ushered at once into the photographer's presence.

'What do you wish?' Mr. Hayward asked, rising and bowing, polite and inscrutable and courtly as ever.

Madame thought of her instructions, and answered to the letter :

'I was told to ask for Mr. Hayward.'

The photographer smiled.

'Quite right,' he replied more approvingly, in an almost genial tone. 'And Mr. Hayward was to show you to . . . another person.' He changed his expression suddenly as he added in Russian, dropping into it all at once, 'But the two are one. Olga Mireff, don't you know me? I am Ruric Brassoﬀ!'

Madame rose in alarm from the chair where she had seated herself. Her head swam vaguely. Her eyes grew dim. She clapped one hand to her forehead in amaze and bewilderment.

'Is this a trap?' she asked piteously, gazing

about her, all unnerved. 'Do you want to take me in? You're not telling me the truth. I knew the man well. You're *not* Prince Ruric Brassoﬀ.'

'Not the Prince. No, that's true. I ceased to be a prince long ago,' Mr. Hayward answered. 'But Ruric Brassoﬀ—yes, still the same as of old. Look hard, Olga Mireﬀ, and see if you can recognise me!'

Madame Mireﬀ gazed intently at him. Her look was riveted on every part in turn. Then she shook her head.

'Not a trace,' she replied. 'Not a feature—the eyes—perhaps the eyes. But no, impossible, impossible!'

Mr. Hayward seized a pen and wrote a word or two in haste on a sheet of white paper.

'Whose handwriting's that?' he asked, with an air of demonstration. 'And this?' he cried once more, writing another line and handing it to her.

Madame Mireff looked at it, amazed.

‘Another man’s,’ she answered, holding one hand on her heart; ‘the same we’ve always been accustomed to call your secretary’s.’

Mr. Hayward put his hand to his mouth, and, fiddling slightly with his fingers, withdrew something hard from the side of the gums. His cheeks fell in a little. He was less round-faced than before.

‘Do you recognise any likeness now?’ he asked, with a quiver in his voice.

‘Hardly any. Well, perhaps—but, there! it’s so slight. Oh no, so unlike that handsome Ruric Brassoﬀ of the old days at Petersburg. More stately—severer—grander perhaps—but less beautiful. He was fair. You’re dark. He had a beard. You’ve none. His moustache and hair were light-brown, almost yellow. Yours are black.’ And she hesitated.

‘Dye, dye—mere dye!’ Mr. Hayward mused musically.

‘But the features!’ Madame Mireff exclaimed, incredulous. ‘The voice! No; impossible! A man can’t change his profile, his build, his gait, his very tone. You’re trying to impose upon me, to lure me to some snare. I can never believe it! You’re *not* Ruric Brassoﬀ!’

Mr. Hayward gazed hard at her.

‘Have you the letter that brought you here?’ he asked very quietly.

Madame pulled it from her bosom.

The Nihilist took it, and shook his head solemnly.

‘Wrong, wrong; quite wrong,’ he said with a despondent gesture, laying it down by the signature he had just written for comparison. ‘Who can work with such tools? You carry *this* about with you! Why, you ought to have burnt it, of course, the moment you’d read it. Suppose you’d been run over by accident in the street, and such a thing had been found upon you!’ He crumpled the

note and held it up for one minute before his eyes ; then he lighted a match and reduced it with the other paper by its side to ashes. She watched it burning. ‘ Well, you saw,’ he went on with a sigh, ‘ those are the self-same signatures. The letters you’ve been accustomed to receive—and obey—from Ruric Brassoff, are letters from *me* ! That much you can make out with your own eyes, at any rate. And I’m all of Ruric Brassoff that yet remains, though time and privations no doubt have made me thin and lank. There’s not enough left of me now for you to recognise, seemingly.’

Madame Mireff stared at him astonished.

‘ How’ve you done it ?’ she asked, wondering. ‘ I suppose I must believe you’re Ruric Brassoff since you say so ; but how on earth have you managed so completely to disguise yourself ?’

The Nihilist chief laid his hand on her shoulder with his parental air.

‘Listen, Olga Mireff,’ he said solemnly. ‘You remember what I was—how brought up—in what luxury. No young man of fashion in Petersburg was better dressed than I; no soldier had more successes; no companion was more sought after. I was rich, I was great, I was noble, I was powerful. Well, one day, with a sudden awakening, conscience smote me like a sword. There was a thunderstorm at Petersburg. I came to myself all at once in the midst of the tempest; I realized my own nothingness in this vast teeming universe. I heard, as if with my own ears, the plaintive cry of our Russian peasant; you know that low cry, all stifled wailing and lamentation, in which centuries of serfdom and suffering seem concentrated. His squalid misery touched me—that great pathetic figure, broken down by toil, exhausted by hunger, worn out with exactions. I awoke to a new life; I felt my heart throb for him, this inarticulate, dumb tortured thing,

who can weep, but cannot speak ; this endless crucified sufferer. Then I fell on my face before the Lord, like Paul on the way to Damascus ; I took in my heart a solemn oath to concentrate my life, my strength, my thoughts, my energies, to the liberation of that patient, voiceless, manifold people, which drains its life-blood eternally in order that we, the favoured children of privilege and wealth, may live at our ease in great towns, eat, drink, and wive us, and make merry on its sacrifice.'

'I know it,' Madame answered, flushing red in her turn, and clasping her hands hard with emotion. 'I, too—I have felt it.'

'Well, and you know the rest in part,' the ardent Revolutionist went on, with the Slavonic fire in his bosom now burning bright like a lamp. 'How I tore off those gilded clothes, that ate like vitriol into my flesh ; how I put on the rough coat and wooden shoes of the peasant ; how I wasted my vast

fortune like water for the Cause ; how I herded with poor wretches, eating their black bread and drinking their poisonous vodki, that I might carry to them the great gospel of our age—the social revolution. What matter to me if the cut-throats of the Government laid hold upon my vile body ? What matter to me exile, death, torture, Siberia ? You and I shrink not from such sacrifice. We could meet the axe itself with a smile of pure happiness.’

Madame Mireff clenched her hands still harder.

‘It is you!’ she cried. ‘It is you ! I followed you from the Court. I recognise there the true voice of Ruric Brassoﬀ.’

Mr. Hayward’s voice grew calmer.

‘In time, then,’ he went on, relapsing once more into his accustomed self, ‘I found, as you know, I could serve our great Cause better in the West than in Russia. They stole my fortune, or all that was left of it.

I came abroad, and determined no man should ever recognise again the head of the organization. It was painful, but I did it. You say it's impossible to alter one's profile. Not so ! Just a little bit of cartilage removed—see here'—and he took a sketch from a drawer at his side—'there's the Ruric Brassoﬀ you knew long ago at Petersburg. But cut away a mere shade there—under the flesh—a great Paris surgeon. Yes, it was an internal operation, of course, and horribly agonizing—but for the Cause ! and I am a Brassoﬀ ! A razor to my chin, a little plain black dye, a different cut of the hair, a new twist to the moustache, does all the rest. And see ! in a minute'—he added a touch or two with his pencil to the early sketch—'you get me as I am now—Lambert Hayward, photographer, and a naturalized subject of her Britannic Majesty !'

Madame glanced at him in admiration.

'The disguise is so perfect,' she said, after

a long, deep pause, 'that I never for a moment so much as suspected it. And, what's more, when you told me at first, I couldn't believe it; but your voice—your voice—how have you altered even that so profoundly, so completely?'

Ruric Brassoff sighed deeply.

'Ah, that was hard indeed,' he answered. 'There's only one way. Compression and alteration of shape in the larynx, with operations on the vocal cords, and constant use of local muscular astringents. Those, aided by fresh habits of life and English intonation—with my cheek-pieces to boot—have given me a new voice even in speaking Russian. As for my handwriting, that's nothing. Anyone can manage that. I practise both hands constantly, and alternate them as I please. One's my original style, written with a backward slope and a thick blunt pen, very Russian and natural; the other's acquired, written the opposite way, and with a fine-

pointed nib, forming all my letters on the common English model. But, Olga, you're the very first person in the world who has ever been permitted to penetrate my disguise. And only because I feared you might wreck all by your imprudence, and because I didn't like to risk committing the facts to writing—especially to you, who are so liable to interruption by the agents of the tyranny—I decided, after long debate, to ask you round here to-day to talk things over with me. I want to show you how dangerous, how undesirable, it is for you to make any further inquiries about Owen and Sacha Cazalet.'

CHAPTER XIX.

CONSPIRACY.

‘OF course,’ Madame said, still trembling inwardly, ‘they are Sergius Selistoff’s children.’

Mr. Hayward bent his head.

‘Sergius Selistoff’s children,’ he repeated. ‘Yes, Sergius Selistoff’s children. When the Terror broke out, and Sergius Selistoff was hurried away by administrative power to the Siberian mines, I managed to smuggle off Madame Selistoff unperceived, with the little ones by her side, as far as Wilna. There, as you must of course remember, the poor lady’s brain, tortured by the thought of her husband’s hideous fate and her anxiety for her children,

gave way altogether. She rushed out into the streets, raving mad, from her place of concealment, crying aloud that the Czar was murdering her Sergius and stealing her babies from her; and for the little ones' sake—there was no help for it—we were obliged to abandon her. It was some weeks before I could carry the poor orphaned creatures surreptitiously across the Prussian frontier, and then by steamer from Dantzic to England. Madame Selistoff, as you know, died meanwhile, still raving mad, in the asylum at Wilna, and I was forced, for our poor martyr's sake, to undertake the charge of Sacha and the boy Sergius.'

'Whom you call Owen?' Madame put in interrogatively.

'Whom we now call Owen,' Mr. Hayward assented, with a fatherly smile. 'You see, Olga, the girl was four years old, and wouldn't hear of being called by any name but Sacha, which was the pet name she'd always borne in her

father's house at Petersburg ; so I had to leave her alone ; but the boy was a baby, and as I wished to bring him up a thorough-going Englishman, I committed him at once to Miss Cazalet's care, under the name of Owen. It was years before he knew he was Russian by origin.'

'You were still Ruric Brassoﬀ, then?' Madame asked.

'Not exactly. I was passing just that moment through an intermediate state—reversing the usual process—from butterfly to caterpillar. I took them personally to Miss Cazalet's, representing myself as a Polish refugee, but with the face and complexion of the Ruric Brassoﬀ that used to be. I told the poor lady—who's a feeble-minded English old maid ; you know the type : weak tea, respectability, district-visiting, the Central African missions—they were her half-sister's children. Madame Selistoff had given me the address and the family history before I started, and

Sacha was quite old enough to understand and remember most things. But I explained to the good aunt it would be dangerous to let it get noised abroad they were Russians and Selistoffs; the Czar might claim them as his subjects, and send them, too, to Siberia. I frightened her so much, indeed, that she consented at last to acquiesce in the story that their father had died in Canada, and to suppress their real name—which was much for an Englishwoman. They've been brought up ever since in her house, as Cazalets, and as British subjects, though Alexandra never forgot she was a Selistoff born, nor the horror and terror of those days at Wilna.'

'And the change of face?' Madame inquired.

'The change of face came afterwards. For three years I never saw Miss Cazalet again, though I wrote to her occasionally and sent her money for the children—how hard earned, God only knows; saved often by starving

myself from the Ruric Brassoff you knew to the spare and weather-worn man you see before you now. Meanwhile, I was undergoing my new birth—passing through my chrysalis stage in holes and corners—resting quiescent as Ruric Brassoff, to emerge from the shell as Lambert Hayward, an Englishman. Bergmann, of Berlin, transformed my voice for me—most difficult operation on the vocal cords. Charcot managed my features, not knowing who I might be or why I wanted them altered. I learned English, too, in an English family in Yorkshire, and having our Russian taste for languages, like yourself, perfected myself rapidly. When the metamorphosis was complete I took to photography. I'd been an amateur in Petersburg, you remember, and I made it pay in London. Having lost my all, for the sake of the Cause, I was bound to make money.'

'And does the aunt—the old maid—know all this?' Madame asked with deep interest.

‘Not a soul on earth but yourself knows a word of it. You are the first—most likely you will be the last—who has ever been so honoured. Not even Sacha suspects it—my disguise was so perfect. I have such little doubt of its absolute effectiveness that I’d go to Petersburg itself, if necessary, as an English tourist. Well, at the end of three years I saw Miss Cazalet again, this time as an Englishman who had known Sergius Selistoff and his wife at Vienna. I drove a hard-and-fast bargain with her, which has been loyally kept on both sides ever since. I engaged to keep Owen, and pay for his education, and start him in life as my own son, if she’d let me have him with me for two months in each year to do as I liked with. Poor lady! she jumped at it—though she’d have cut her throat sooner if she’d known what I really wanted him for—she, with her narrow Evangelical views and her Central African missions; absorbed, not so much in the bread of life, as in the necessity

of getting it from this, that, or the other particular baker. But she took me for an Englishman, and she takes me for one still, though she has doubts in her own mind now as to the rightfulness of the bargain and as to the nature of my journeyings up and down over Europe.'

'Well, and what are you going to do with the young man?' Madame Mireff asked again. 'He looks like fine fibre—fit for any service humanity may choose to require of him.'

'He is,' Ruric Brassoﬀ answered, with affectionate pride. 'A magnificent body; a pure, enthusiastic, unselfish soul. Our best Russian characteristics have come out in him full-toned—only heightened and improved by free English training. He's a noble instrument for a noble end. Frankly, Olga, I'm proud of him.'

'And he belongs to the Cause?'

'Implicitly. He has sucked it in at the breast with his mother's milk almost. From

his earliest boyhood, as soon as he was able to understand anything, I began preparing the way beforehand, ploughing and harrowing the soil, sowing the good seed tentatively, in proportion as his years would permit him to receive it. And it fell on good ground; being Sergius Selistoff's son, he was naturally receptive. He loves Russia with a love passing the love of those who have lived in it and known it. The cause of free Slavonia is to him an ideal, an aspiration, a religion. He is one of us to the core. He has no doubts, no hesitations.'

'I see,' Madame answered. 'That is fine; that is splendid. And you're going to put him, Lady Beaumont said, I think, into the English diplomatic service.'

'Yes. He'll be useful to us there as he would be nowhere else. It's a long task, to be free. We must build for the future. I've been building this one step patiently for twenty years and more. . . . *Attachés* and

ambassadors have access to Court dignitaries which no one else can secure. . . . A day may come when Owen Cazalet can strike a great blow for Russia.' He paused, and drummed hard with one finger on the table. Then he added, once more in a quaintly pensive tone: 'I read in an anthropological book this morning that on Savage Island, in the South Pacific, a line of kings once reigned over a dusky people. But as these kings partook of a Divine nature, and were supposed to make the rain fall, and the crops grow apace, their subjects got angry with them when the food-supplies fell short, and killed them off rapidly, one after another, in a spell of bad seasons, till at last so many kings were clubbed to death in succession that nobody cared to accept the office. The title went begging for want of aspirants. . . . And I laid down the book, and thought of Russia.'

Madame Mireff smiled grimly.

‘But, then, Owen doesn’t know who you are?’ she asked in an afterthought.

‘No, even Owen doesn’t know. As for Sacha, though she suspects me, no doubt, of being a Russian, perhaps even a Nihilist, she knows nothing at all—and, with true Slav reticence, abstains from asking me. She’s a fine creature, Sacha. I believe, if she knew, she’d sympathize all round, for she remembers her mother’s death and her father’s long slavery. But she’s a genuine Slavonic type in that also; she sees it’s no business of hers, and she makes no inquiries. There’s something about Sacha’s subdued steadfastness of purpose I admire immensely. Old and worn as I am, if ever I married now, I sometimes think to myself I’d marry Sacha Cazalet.’

He paused a moment and sighed. No, no, he himself was above those weaknesses he had pointed out to Owen as the great stumbling-blocks in a patriot’s path. True Russian ascetic at heart, he had brought his

body under, and his soul as well. No snare for *him* there! He could smile at the bare thought of it.

‘And now you see, Olga Mireff,’ he went on, more grave than ever, ‘how unwisely you are acting, and how you were thwarting my plans—the plans of the Cause—by suggesting in public those children might be Russians. My one object in Owen’s education has been to make him an Englishman all over, in externals at least—to make him strong and good at games, and personally popular with Englishmen. I wanted nobody even to suspect any Russian connection. I wanted this bolt to fall upon them from the blue—attempt on the life of the great head of the criminals; the aggressor, an Englishman, a servant of the British Crown—an *attaché* or ambassador at Constantinople, say, or at Athens. Conceive what a sensation! And you nearly spoilt all—you, a woman, and unbid—by suggesting in the room where

Lord Caistor was sitting, that my fine English young man, my typical Briton, may be, after all, a son of Sergius Selistoff's !

Madame covered her face with her hands at the magnitude of her own error.

‘Oh, this is too terrible of me !’ she cried, all penitence. ‘What folly ! What indiscretion ! But I did it only because I wanted to know the facts—to save them from the clutches of Alexis Selistoff in Petersburg.’

‘He asked you to hunt them up ?’ Mr. Hayward asked calmly.

‘Yes ; he asked me to hunt them up, and how could I know you were interested in keeping it secret ? I wanted to warn the dear souls against that man—that implacable bureaucrat, that vile tool, their uncle. If ever he discovered them, he’d be capable, I believe, of inviting them to Petersburg under friendly promises, and then killing them with his own hand, or flinging them secretly into his cells, to avenge and wipe out the family

disgrace, as he considers it ; and I wanted to save them ! But all I've done, it seems, is to surprise the secret you desired to keep. I've forced your hand, I know well. . . . Ruric Brassoﬀ, there's but one way I can atone for my wrong-doing.'

She looked up at him with fierce pride. Mr. Hayward eyed her pityingly.

'Olga,' he said, after a long pause, 'you're quite right. There's but one way out of it. And when I invited you to come here to-day, I meant to ask you to follow that way to the bitter end. If I asked you, I know your devotion well enough to feel sure you'd obey. The woman who has discovered Ruric Brassoﬀ's identity against his will—the woman who alone of living creatures could bring a spy to this spot, and point her finger at me and say, "This is he ; arrest him"—that woman ought to go home without one moment's hesitation and cut her own throat or blow her own brains out. The Cause demands it,

I know; and the martyr would be forthcoming.'

Madame rose and confronted him. Her eye flashed fire.

'Ruric Brassoﬀ!' she exclaimed haughtily, 'you have said it. It is done—already.'

He seized her hand and checked her.

'No, no!' he cried; 'not so fast. I didn't mean *that*! I have other plans yet in store. Olga Mireﬀ, I need you still. For the sake of the Cause, I command you—I forbid you. I give you a harder task yet. . . . Live on, and keep silence.'

'Then you trust me!' the woman cried, trembling with joy all over at so signal a proof of Ruric Brassoﬀ's confidence.

'I trust you,' he answered low. 'Live on to complete our great work, Olga Mireﬀ. But never breathe to a soul that you have seen or known me.'

She looked at him, proud and resolute.

‘Ruric Brassoﬀ,’ she said, beaming delight, ‘I am yours, and Russia’s. You can do as you will with me. Say “Die!” and I die; say “Live!” and I live on, were it in speechless misery.’

He bowed his head towards her, acquiescent.

‘It is atoned,’ he said slowly.

She lifted those rich lips. ‘For Russia!’ she murmured beseechingly.

He stooped down, and just touched them.

‘For Russia!’ he answered, in the tone of one inspired. ‘For Russia only. For Russia.’

She started back, rosy red. She was a woman, after all.

‘Thank you, Ruric,’ she answered. ‘I shall remember that kiss through life. My lips are holy now. Russia’s noblest son has deigned to sanctify them.’

He motioned her away with his hand. She moved slowly to the door.

‘Good-bye,’ she said, enraptured, with her hand on the lintel. ‘Never again, dear brother. But as you bid me, I live; and no torture shall drag your secret from me.’

CHAPTER XX.

SORE TEMPTED.

IT was autumn at Moor Hill, and the beeches on the chalk downs had put on their imperial robes of crimson and gold and Tyrian purple. How could Sacha resist the temptation of a visit to Aunt Julia's at such an enticing time? Impossible; she felt she must run down to see them. There was a holiday on the Stock Exchange, too, and Trevor Gardener, most timid of men, still all tentative politeness, had asked leave to accompany her.

‘That’s the worst of allowing these people a foothold in one’s house as hewers of wood and drawers of water,’ Sacha grumbled, half petulantly, to Ionê. ‘They presume upon their

position, and want at last to dine at the same table, instead of sticking, as they ought, to their place in the kitchen. We'd have done better to go in, I see, for being thoroughly independent from the very first outset. The mistake was made when we permitted such an insinuating creature as a man to come interfering at all with our cosy little phalanstery.'

'They *are* insinuating—sometimes,' Ionê answered, with a mischievous laugh. 'And sometimes they're not—not half insinuating enough—especially when you'd like them to be. They want you to lift them over all the hard stiles, instead of lending you a helping hand to get over yourself, out of consideration for your skirts, and your native modesty as a woman. I've met some of them that way.' Perhaps she was thinking of Owen. 'But, my dear, you may grumble about them as much as ever you like—you won't take me in.' And she shook a wise little head. 'We wouldn't get on half as well without them.'

But as it wouldn't be proper, of course, for you and Mr. Gardener to go down together alone, why, sooner than shock Mrs. Grundy or your aunt, I don't mind obliging you myself, and making the third, who's proverbially no company. I'd like so much to see '—she didn't say Owen, but—' your old studio at the Red Cottage.'

It is thus that even the frankest of us use language, as Talleyrand said, to conceal our thoughts. For Ionê, after all, was as frank as it is given her half of the human species ever to show itself openly.

When Aunt Julia heard she was coming—' that dreadful toozly-haired creature, you know, that you met in Morocco, Owen, and whose portrait in men's clothes, and a Mussulman's at that (or should one say a Mussulwoman's?), was put in the *Graphic*'—her horror and alarm were simply unbounded. 'What Sacha can mean by bringing the girl down here and flinging her at your head, I'm

sure I can't conceive,' Aunt Julia sighed dismally. 'But there, what the young women of this age are coming to, heaven only knows; with their flats and their latchkeys and their riding like gentlemen; it's enough to make their grandmothers turn in their graves. *You* won't care for her, Owen, that's one comfort, for I know you always say you like women to be womanly, and this creature's exactly the same as a man, and not a good man at that, either. I read some of her article about Morocco in the *Bi-monthly Review*—I *couldn't* read it all—and it showed she was utterly devoid of sound Christian principles. She goes into one of the dark places of the earth without making the faintest attempt to spread the light there. She jokes about the most serious subjects in a really painful way; talks of Mohammedans without one word as to their errors or their immortal souls; and lived at one place in an old Moor's house, who had three wives in his harem, which is certainly

not respectable. When I was a girl, a woman who did such things as that would have been ashamed to speak out about them ; but nowadays they write a full account of their vagaries in a magazine, as if masquerading in man's clothes was something to be proud of.'

Owen said nothing. But the fact that Aunt Julia thought so ill of Ionê rather operated in his mind as an extra attraction to the pretty Greek girl than otherwise. It was an unfortunate knack of Aunt Julia's, indeed, not unknown amongst old maids, to rouse opposition at once in young people's souls by the mere manner of her pronouncement. And if there was anything Aunt Julia wanted Owen to do, she couldn't have devised a better means of ensuring her end than to preach at him, in season and out of season, that he oughtn't to do it.

But when Ionê really came, she burst upon them, as usual, like a ray of sunlight. Even the prop of the Universities' Mission herself,

prepared for a most masculine and forbidding person, was taken aback at the first blush by Ionê's joyous and irrepressibly girlish personality.

‘So this is Aunt Julia!’ the dreaded stranger cried, taking both Miss Cazalet's hands warmly in hers, as the mistress of the house, with solemn dignity, in all the glory of her black silk and her creamy lace head-dress, stood awesome by the jasmine-covered porch to receive them. ‘I've heard such a lot about Aunt Julia from Owen and Sacha already that I almost seem to know you by anticipation; and as for me, I'm afraid you've seen a great deal too much of me in the papers long ago—those dreadful papers! Oh yes, I know—they've stuck me in in all attitudes and all earthly costumes till I'm sick of seeing in print “Miss Ionê Dracopoli.” It's simply wearisome. But what a sweet little cottage, though—and what lovely chrysanthemums! I never saw such a splendid outdoor specimen

in my life as that white Japanese one. You should send it to a flower-show !'

Now, chrysanthemums, as it happened, were Aunt Julia's one weakness (we are all of us human), and Ionê had heard of that weakness beforehand, and, after her feminine fashion, had dexterously utilized it. But the remark and the fresh exuberance of that brisk young life had their due effect, none the less, in mollifying Aunt Julia's stony British heart. She could never quite forgive Ionê, to be sure, for neglecting to distribute an Arabic version of 'Jessica's First Prayer' in the harem at Oran ; but she admitted to herself grudgingly in her own small soul that the poor child was, at any rate, as she phrased it, 'an amiable heathen.'

As for Trevor Gardener, Aunt Julia thought well of him at the very first blush—an expression which in this case was strictly appropriate. He wore spotless kid gloves and very shiny white shirt-cuffs, the sight of which

made her feel instinctively sure of the soundness of his principles. For not only were principles the object of a perfect idolatry with Aunt Julia; they were also recognisable to the naked eye; she spoke of them always as of articles that might be weighed and measured, so to speak, by the square foot or the pound avoirdupois. She was a connoisseur in principles, indeed. She liked the very best, and she knew them at once when she saw them.

After lunch, Sacha proposed a walk on the downs. The idea, though not so very original, after all, struck Owen at once as particularly brilliant. A walk on the downs! How clever, now, of Sacha! He didn't want to talk to Ionê alone for anything special, of course; Mr. Hayward's solemn warning against the pitfalls of the sex had sunk too deep into his mind for any such wickedness as that; but still, at Aunt Julia's, you know, and in the drawing-room, before all those listening ears, why, what could

one talk about worth hearing to such a girl as Ionê? For, though Owen had only met Ionê half a dozen times, all told, since his return from Morocco, he felt vaguely to himself that he and she, while not the least bit in the world *in love* with one another, of course, had yet arrived instinctively—well, at a sort of understanding between themselves—that kind of understanding, don't you know, which makes it quite impossible to talk your mind out freely before a third person.

We have all been there ourselves, and we know what it means. Not *love*—oh dear no! not necessarily or exactly what you may call downright *love*, don't you see, but a sort of sympathy, or friendship, or familiarity, or good fellowship, or let us even say—ahem!—confidential relations. No harm in the world in confidential relations. Provided always—but there, what's the use of talking about it? We have been there ourselves, I repeat—and we remember where it landed us!

As they strolled up the hill, all four of them together, the path between the hedge and the wood was narrow. Only room for two abreast—so they paired off, naturally. Owen's long legs made him stride on in front; and Ionê kept up with him like a trained mountain-climber. Trevor Gardener, on the contrary, always correct in his dress, and with name-sake flower in his buttonhole, walked a more town-bred pace with Sacha, behind. The two athletes soon distanced him, and were well out of earshot among the crimson-clad beeches.

‘I'm glad we came out,’ Owen broke forth at last, after one long deep pause, gazing hard, though askance, at his companion's fresh face. ‘It's so nice to be alone with you once again, Ionê.’

He said it with the shy but naïve frankness of the hobbledehoy to the budding girl. Ionê's cheek, already rosy with the walk uphill, flushed a deeper red still as he spoke

—and looked at her. There was more in his look ten thousand times than in his words.

‘Then, you like to be with me, Owen?’ she asked, just as frankly, in return, with that free Greek unreserve of hers.

Owen started and looked again.

‘Why, of course I do!’ he answered quickly.
‘Who wouldn’t, Ionê?’

Ionê stepped on, now treading springy on the close sward of the open downs. Her foot-fall was light and tripping as an Oread’s.

‘That’s nice!’ she said, with a simple smile.
‘One likes best to be liked by those one likes one’s self, don’t you think? So much better than all those smart men one meets up in London.’

‘You go out a great deal?’ Owen asked, trembling. It meant so much to him.

‘Well, you see, just this season I was a sort of a lion. Next year it’ll have worn off, and everybody’ll have forgotten me. But this

year I've been made much of, and asked out for a show—just to swell Mrs. Brown's or Lady Vere de Vere's triumph.'

'And the men talk a great deal to you?'

'Yes. You know the way they talk. Men who've seen everything, know everybody, go everywhere. Men who say clever things—with a sting in the tail. Men who don't seem to believe in the existence of truth or goodness anywhere. They come up to me, all outward deference, but with a lurking suspicion in their eyes that seems to say, "Now, what game are *you* playing? How do you want to tackle me?" And then their talk!' She mimicked them mischievously. "'Going to any of these dances to-night?" "Yes, going to two or three of them." "Know the Burne-Joneses?" "No. Why? Are they giving a party?" I heard a man say that one night, in town, I assure you. Oh, isn't it just sickening? I'm glad the autumn's come and the season's all over. I'm glad to get down

here, if it's only for a day—one lovely day—to nature and reality.'

'It was good of you to come,' Owen murmured, abashed and afraid. 'I was so awfully glad when I heard you were coming.'

Ionê turned to him with a flash of light in her happy eyes. The chestnut hair blew free round her face in the autumn breeze. Her glance was very tender.

'Oh, Owen! then you wanted me?' she said. She was too much in love with him herself not to throw herself so upon him.

Owen drew back and hesitated. He knew only too well he was on dangerous ground. If Mr. Hayward were but there to see how sorely he was tempted! But Mr. Hayward was far away, and Ionê was near—very near indeed. Her breath blew warm on his cheek. Her eyes held him and fascinated him.

'Yes, I wanted you—Ionê,' he said slowly. But he said it with a reservation. He knew how very wrong it was. This siren was

charming him away from the plain path of duty.

As for Ionê, she drew back like one stung. The reservation in his voice roused the woman within her. She felt herself slighted. She felt she had flung herself upon him—and he had rejected the boon. No woman on earth can stand that. She drew away from him proudly.

‘Let’s sit down and wait for Sacha,’ she said coldly in an altered tone. ‘They’ll be coming up soon. I oughtn’t to have got so far in front of her.’

It was Owen’s turn now to feel a pang of remorse.

‘Oh no, don’t let’s sit down,’ he cried; ‘don’t deprive me of this pleasure. Ionê, I’ve longed so to get a few words with you alone ever since you arrived at Moor Hill this morning. You can’t think what a joy it is to me just to walk by your side, just to hear your sweet voice. You’re so different from

other girls. I'm so happy when I'm with you.'

'Happy?' Ionê repeated, half angrily.

'Oh, you know I am! You can see it. Why, I thrill all over.'

His knees trembled as he said it. But he said it all the same. He looked at her shyly as he spoke, blushing red with first love. He'd have given worlds to kiss her. And he would have done it, too—if it hadn't been for the Cause and Mr. Hayward.

'Then why did you say in that tone: "Ye-es—um—I—ah—wanted you—Ionê"?'

'Because,' Owen cried, driven to bay, and with his heart throbbing wildly, 'I longed to say, "Yes, madly—intensely—unspeakably." But I know it's quite wrong. I oughtn't to speak so to you.'

'Why not?' Ionê asked, fronting him with inexorable calmness.

Owen looked at her harder still.

Oh, how beautiful she was, how strong, how

free, how irresistible ! Talk about the Cause indeed ! What was the Cause to him to-day ? Has a Cause such bright eyes as that, such red lips, such blushing cheeks, such a heaving bosom ? Has a Cause such soft hands ?

‘ Because,’ he faltered feebly once more, ‘ how can I fall in love now—at barely twenty-one—and with nothing to live upon ?’

‘ But you *have* fallen in love,’ Ionê answered demonstratively.

She knew it better than he did. She saw it quite clearly in his face by this time, and being herself, she said so.

That straight statement of a plain fact helped Owen out immensely.

‘ Yes, I *have* fallen in love,’ he answered, panting, and with his heart in his mouth. ‘ Oh, Ionê, so very much ! I love you with all my soul. I shall always love you—you ever, and you only.’

‘ I knew it,’ Ionê answered, flushing bright red once more, and with the love-light in her

eyes. 'And—I love you the same, Owen. I loved you almost from that very first night at Ain-Essa. . . . And, oh, if we both feel it, why shouldn't we say so?'

They had wandered away from the path as they spoke, behind great clumps of holly bushes.

Owen looked at her once more, raised his hand, and caught hers instinctively.

'Because it would be wrong of me!' he murmured, all tremulous, clasping her fingers in his own. 'I mustn't even kiss you.' But he bent forward as he spoke. 'I don't belong to myself,' he cried; 'I am bought with a price. I should be doing injustice to others if I were to give way to my love for you.'

'What's her name?' Ionê asked teasingly, withdrawing her hand with a coquettish little air from her lover's.

For she knew very well in her own heart there was no *she* in the matter.

'Oh, Ionê,' Owen cried, all reproach. 'You

know very well there's nobody on earth I care a pin for but you. And for you—I would die for you !'

'Yes, I know,' Ionê answered, turning suddenly round and facing him. Her voice, though still tremulous, rang quick, clear, and decisive. 'I know what it all means ; I guessed it long ago. You don't think you must fall in love with me, because you're otherwise engaged. You promised that horrid Nihilist man to blow up the Czar for him.'

She had played a bold card, played it well and effectively. She meant to release Owen from this hateful thralldom, as she felt it to be, and she went the right way to work to effect her purpose.

Owen gazed at her astonished. How had she divined his secret ? Then, in a moment, it came over him like a wave that, if she knew all already, there was, and could be now, no barrier between them. The holly-bushes, thank Heaven ! rose tall and thick, and

screened them from observation. He seized her hand. He pressed it hard. He touched her rich red lips.

‘Oh, my darling!’ he cried, in a transport of wild joy—of sudden relief from terrible tension. ‘I love you—I love you! I shall always love you!’

He clasped her in his arms.

She nestled there gladly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EQUALITY OF WOMAN.

It was quite a long time before Sacha and Trevor Gardener caught them up. And the reason was, in part, because Sacha and Trevor Gardener were equally well employed on their own account independently.

He was a shy man, Trevor Gardener, and they'd climbed a long way up the steep slope of the hill before he turned round to his companion with a sudden burst, and blurted out in his modestly jerky way :

‘ Look here, Sacha, it was awfully good of you to suggest we should come out like this, this afternoon. I was so angry when Ionê first proposed to run down with us. I wanted

a *tête-à-tête* with you, and her coming spoiled it.'

'I knew you did, Trevor,' Sacha answered calmly. It had been 'Trevor' and 'Sacha' from the very first with them in that most modern household, where conventions were not. 'I knew you did, and that's why I proposed coming out here.'

'Oh, how kind of you!' Trevor Gardener cried, looking admiration unspoken from those honest blue eyes. 'So like you, too, Sacha!'

'I thought it'd be best to get it over once for all,' Sacha answered, unmoved to the outer eye. But she gathered up her skirt and pinned it as she spoke, with hands that trembled just a wee bit more than one would have thought quite likely with such a girl as Sacha.

Trevor Gardener gazed at her astonished, and not a little troubled in mind.

'To get it over!' he echoed, ill at ease.

‘Oh, Sacha, what do you mean? To get it over?’

‘Well, I thought you had something to say to me,’ Sacha continued, outwardly very calm, but with three nervous fingers toying quick on the ivory Japanese button that fastened her watch-chain. ‘I gathered it from your manner. And I thought--the sooner said, the sooner mended.’

Trevor Gardener’s face fell.

‘Then you know . . . what I was going to say to you?’ he murmured, much crestfallen.

‘We women have our intuitions,’ Sacha replied oracularly, still playing with the button.

‘And your answer would have been——’

Sacha laughed an amused little laugh.

‘How on earth can I say, Trevor,’ she exclaimed, more frankly and less timidly, ‘when I haven’t heard your question?’

Trevor Gardener glanced askance at her, the shy glance of the bashful young man.

‘That’s true,’ he mused, hesitating. ‘But

still, Sacha—your intuitions, you know—you might *guess* the question.'

Sacha smiled still more broadly.

'What a funny man you are!' she cried, pulling a flower-head as she passed. 'You want me to play both hands at once, your own and mine. You want me to give both question and answer.'

Trevor admitted in his own mind she was perfectly right. And yet, somehow, he couldn't muster up courage to frame in words what he wanted.

'Well, you meant to have this *tête-à-tête* with me, anyhow?' he suggested after a short pause.

'Oh yes,' Sacha answered. 'I told you so before. I wanted to get it over.'

'It?'

'Yes—it.'

'But you like me, don't you?' the young man burst out pleadingly.

Sacha's face flushed rosy red.

‘I like you very much indeed,’ she replied. ‘When first you came and offered to do our work for us, I was only interested in you—just interested in you—nothing more, because I saw you sympathized with us and understood our motives. But the more I’ve seen of you the better I’ve liked you. I like your simplicity of heart, your straightforwardness of action, your singleness of aim, your honest earnestness. I see you’re a real live man with a soul of your own, among all these tailor-made Frankenstein dummies. And I’m very, very fond of you. There, now, will that do for you?’

She turned round upon him almost fiercely, so that the young man quailed. But he mustered up courage all the same to look her full in the face and add :

‘And you’ll say *yes* to my question, then? You won’t refuse me?’

‘What is it?’ Sacha replied, running her hand through the tall grass nervously as she

spoke. 'See here, Trevor. You compel me to be plain.' Her heart was beating violently. 'There are two questions, either of which you may mean to ask, though you might have thought of them yourself as different. One is, "Do you love me?" The other is, "Will you marry me?" There, now,' her face was crimson, but she went on with an effort, 'you've forced me to ask them myself, after all. It isn't woman's sphere—but you've driven me into it. Well, which of the two do you want me to answer?'

Trevor Gardener seized her hand and held it, unresisted, one second in his own. A wave of delight passed over him from head to foot.

'Well, the first one first,' he said, stammering. 'Oh, Sacha, do you love me?'

Sacha tore the tiny spikelets from the grass-head one by one with trembling fingers as she answered in a very firm voice, soft and low :

'Yes, Trevor.'

The young man's heart gave a bound. He

raised her hand to his lips and kissed it fervently.

‘That’s everything!’ he cried, overjoyed, all his timidity deserting him now; for when a woman once admits she loves you, what have you further to fear? ‘And, Sacha, will you marry me?’

‘No, Trevor,’ Sacha said just as firmly, though still lower, and with a faint under-current of tremulousness in her voice. ‘I love to be with you here; but I will never marry you.’

She said it so definitely that the young man started back in unaffected surprise. He saw she meant it.

‘Not marry me!’ he cried, taken aback, ‘when you love me, too! Oh, Sacha, what on earth do you mean by it?’

Sacha put her hand on her heart, as if to still its throbbing. But her answer was one that fairly took his breath away, none the less, by its utter unexpectedness

‘ You’re rich,’ she said slowly, ‘ quite rich, Trevor, aren’t you ?’

‘ Oh, not so rich as all that comes to,’ the stockbroker replied apologetically, as who should say, ‘ Well, it’s not my fault if I am ’ ; ‘ but, still, comfortably off. I could afford to keep you in the position you’re accustomed to.’

‘ How much do you make a year ?’ Sacha asked, still holding that throbbing heart, and looking into his face appealingly.

‘ Well, it varies,’ the young man answered ; ‘ sometimes more, sometimes less, but always enough to live upon.’

‘ A thousand a year, perhaps ?’ Sacha suggested, naming a sum that to her mind seemed princely magnificence.

‘ Oh yes, a thousand a year, certainly,’ Trevor answered, smiling.

‘ Two thousand ?’ Sacha put in with a gasp, her heart beginning to sink.

‘ Oh yes, two thousand,’ the young man

responded, as carelessly as if it were a mere trifle. What on earth could she be driving at?

‘Three thousand?’ Sacha faltered.

‘Well, perhaps three thousand,’ Trevor admitted with candour; ‘though that depends upon the year. Still, one time with another, I should say—well, yes, about three thousand.’

Sacha drew a deep breath. A pained look crossed her face.

‘Oh, then it’s quite impossible!’ she cried.
‘Quite, quite impossible!’

‘Why so, darling,’ Trevor ventured to ask, ‘since you say you love me?’

Sacha was trembling all over. Her lips looked deadly pale. But she forced herself to speak out, with all the restrained strength of her strong Russian nature.

‘Because, if you’re as rich as all that,’ she said slowly, ‘I must give up my independence; I must give up my individuality; I

must give up my creed in life, which is the equal freedom of women with men ; and I must be merely your wife—like the girls who sell themselves to rich fools for a livelihood. What I could earn by my art would be a mere drop in the bucket. If ever I married, I wanted to marry a man whose earnings were only about the same as my own, and towards whom I could feel like an equal, a partner, a fellow bread-winner.'

She said it very earnestly. It was her faith, her religion ; but something in her tone made Trevor Gardener pause.

'Is that all ?' he said at last, after a long, deep silence, during which each could almost hear the other's heart beat.

And Sacha, in her perfect truthfulness, was constrained to answer :

'No, not *quite* all, Trevor.'

'And what's the rest ?' he asked eagerly, seizing her hand again as he looked. 'You must tell me now, darling.'

Sacha turned away her flushed face. She dared not meet his honest eyes.

‘Oh, don’t ask me that, please!’ she cried. ‘Don’t try to force it out of me! I shall have a hard struggle to keep it in, I know; but I don’t want to tell you.’

A sudden thought flashed all at once across Trevor Gardener’s mind. Many things grew clear to him in one of those rapid intuitions that sometimes break in upon us at great critical moments.

‘I know it! I know it!’ he cried eagerly. ‘You need say no more. It’s on account of Owen.’

‘What do you mean?’ Sacha cried, facing him in her terror, and thoroughly frightened now; ‘I never *told* you so.’

‘No,’ the young man answered. ‘But I see it for myself. You don’t want to do anything while Owen’s future remains so uncertain.’

Sacha gazed at him all appalled. What

had he found out about Owen? She put forth her hand and clutched his arm in her nervous excitement.

‘Owen’s future!’ she cried, deadly pale. ‘Why, who told you *that*, I wonder?’

Trevor Gardener in his turn felt a sudden thrill of revelation. There was more in this than he knew. He had touched some strange chord in her nature too lightly.

‘Sacha,’ he exclaimed in a tone of regret, ‘I’ve done wrong, I see; but I didn’t know. I didn’t understand it—though I half understand now. But only half. I think I can partly guess. Owen’s not his own master. He’s sailing, I fancy, under sealed orders.’

‘You have said it—not I,’ Sacha faltered, all trembling. ‘I *know* no more than you do.’

The young man seized her hand once more, and raised it reverently to his lips.

‘I ask you no questions,’ he said. ‘I

respect your unspoken wish. But some day this knot, no doubt, will unravel itself. Till then I'll wait for you. And if not—why, Sacha, I'll wait for you for ever.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NEMESIS OF CULTURE.

IN London, that same afternoon, it occurred quite casually to Mr. Henley Stokes, at 5, Pump Court, Temple, that, as Sacha and Ionê had gone down to Moor Hill for the day together, Blackbird might possibly find herself rather lonely at the flat off Victoria Street. So, being a good-natured though timid and unsophisticated young man, prone to attempt works of charity in however humble a sphere, he decided with himself, after an internal struggle, to step round to the flat and bear the Cinderella company.

Mr. Henley Stokes was always close-shaven, but seldom did his face look so preternaturally

clean and shiny as on that particular afternoon. Mr. Henley Stokes wore an orchid in his buttonhole as a matter of principle. He was 'sound,' the Birmingham party said, very sound, politically; but never in his life before had so gorgeous an orchid graced his best frock-coat, or so glossy a tall silk hat pressed the curls on his forehead. He stood long before the glass arranging his tie in a loose sailor-knot before he went out; and as he glided along on the District Railway in a first-class carriage, he flashed his cuffs more than once with uneasy solicitude.

It was clear that Henley Stokes, good philanthropist as he was, attached much importance to saving Hope Braithwaite from the dulness of her solitude.

When he rang at the door of the flat, Blackbird opened it to him herself, and then ran back into the passage.

Her sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, and she wore over her dress a dainty cretonne

apron ; but she looked as graceful as ever for all that, in her lithe, though melancholy girlish fashion.

‘I’m housemaid to-day, you see,’ she said, somewhat less listlessly than usual, pulling her sleeves down hurriedly. ‘Ionê answers the door as a rule. But the others are gone away. You must excuse my appearance.’

Henley Stokes stammered out something inaudible about her appearance requiring no apology—quite the contrary, quite the contrary—and followed her into the passage, looking intensely sheepish.

Blackbird, too, had an air as of one caught at some awkward moment.

‘You must let me run out into the laboratory a second,’ she said, almost blushing in those pallid thin cheeks of hers. ‘I’ve something to put away out there. I—er—I was pottering about with my chemicals.’

‘Oh, let *me* come and help you,’ the barrister put in confusedly. ‘You see, I know

all the back premises so well, of course. I cleared away all that litter there before you were up this morning.'

'Oh no, you mustn't come,' Blackbird cried, waving him back ; but the philanthropic young man wouldn't brook being gainsaid. He followed her out into the little pantry—for it was really nothing more—and helped her to take off the queer things she was brewing.

It was only casually as he did so that he happened to observe she had been distilling something greenish from a heap of bruised leaves. A book of directions lay open on the table at 'Hydrocyanic Acid.' A smell as of laurel-water pervaded the little laboratory.

But at the moment Henley Stokes hardly heeded these details. His mind was too much occupied—so he thought just then—with more important matters.

They cleared away the mess, strained the water from the bruised leaves, and put the still she had been working with into the corner

cupboard. Then Blackbird suddenly transformed herself into a drawing-room lady. She loosed her great mass of black hair about her face and shoulders, pulled off her pretty apron, replaced her white cuffs, and went back to the front-room, followed closely by her visitor.

There she flung herself, as was her wont, into the long wicker chair, and clasped her hands behind her head.

‘You look tired,’ Henley Stokes ventured to murmur sympathetically.

‘Yes, tired,’ she echoed, closing her eyes, ‘very tired indeed,’ in a voice of utter lassitude. ‘When wasn’t I tired, I should like to know?’ she added, almost fiercely. ‘I was born tired, I believe; at any rate, I’ve been tired ever since—as long as I can remember I’ve been tired uninterruptedly, dead tired, dog tired! It’s the epitome of my existence.’

The young man leaned across towards her.

‘Miss Braithwaite——’ he began, half tenderly.

Blackbird lifted her lids, looked up at him, and flashed fire from her lustrous eyes.

‘How strange it is,’ she cried petulantly, ‘that you call both the others by their Christian names, but you call *me*, as if on purpose, so stiffly, Miss Braithwaite. Do you do it intentionally? Why this invidious distinction?’

‘Invidious!’ Henley answered, taken aback. ‘Oh no, it isn’t invidious! I could hardly explain to you the reason just yet; but it’s because—well, because I respect and like you so much. When you respect a woman immensely, don’t you know, you—er—are afraid to take liberties with her.’

‘I don’t ask you to take liberties,’ Blackbird cried, half pouting. ‘You take no liberties with Sacha.’

‘Dear me, no!’ Henley answered, submissively, with a smile at the bare idea. ‘I can’t imagine anyone brave enough to take liberties with Miss Cazalet.’

‘And yet you call her Sacha,’ Blackbird retorted, uncrossing and recrossing her hands with nervous agitation.

‘Well, I’d call you Hope—if I dared,’ the young man said shyly.

Blackbird fired up at the word.

‘Hope!’ she cried, with a wild gesture of repulse—‘Hope! Hope! and to me! They christened me Hope, did they? They should have called me Despair. It would have been much more appropriate.’

Henley Stokes looked pityingly at her from those honest kind eyes of his.

‘No, no,’ he put in hastily. ‘Don’t say that, please . . . Blackbird. I may call you Blackbird? Oh, thank you! It’s so kind of you. . . . And you know why I never called you Blackbird before, till this very day, though all the others did, and though I called the others Ionê and Sacha? You *must* know. Can’t you guess? It isn’t very difficult.’

Blackbird shook her head sturdily. This was a bad afternoon with her.

‘Well, because I loved you, then,’ Henley Stokes went on. ‘And when a man really loves a girl, he’s a thousand times more particular about what he says or does to her—a thousand times more careful of her dignity and her sanctity—than with all the others.’

He spoke rapidly, thickly, but with a mingled earnestness and nervousness that might have melted a stone. And he watched Blackbird’s face as he spoke, not daring to take her hand, though it lay on the wicker ledge of the long low chair, just six inches from his own. He was trembling all over. Blackbird saw his eyes glance for a second at those thin white fingers, as if in doubt whether to clasp them or not, and withdrew them hurriedly. Henley noted the action and sighed. There was a long deep pause. Then Blackbird began once more in her weary voice :

‘Why do you say these things to me?’

‘I’ve told you,’ the young man answered, thrilling. ‘Because I love you, Blackbird.’

Blackbird raised her white hand—thin, delicate, blue-veined—and snapped one slender middle finger against the thumb most daintily. In any other woman the action would have been trivial, nay, almost vulgar. In Blackbird it seemed so spiritualized and etherealized by the length and thinness of the fingers that Henley’s heart only sank at it.

‘Love!’ she cried, with a sudden outburst. ‘Love, love! What is it? Pain I know and sleep I know—sleep less well than pain; but pleasure and love?—in *my* world, they are not.’

Henley Stokes gazed down upon her with eyes of infinite pity. This strange aerial creature, all music and thought, with no body to speak of, had yet a strange fascination for the well-dressed, well-to-do, simple-hearted man about town. She had the double attraction of novelty and contrast. She was not in the least like himself, not the least like any-

body. She was unique, unmatched. But he hardly knew what to say, all the same, to so curious an outbreak.

‘Sleep you know!’ he murmured low. ‘And is that the very nearest you ever get to pleasure, Blackbird?’

The girl threw back her well-poised head, turned up her lustrous eyes, and displayed unconsciously to the best advantage that full and luscious throat which marks the vocalist’s temperament.

‘The very nearest I ever get to it,’ she answered slowly. ‘Yes, the very, very nearest.’ She clasped her blue-veined hands behind her head once more, and closed her big eyes dreamily. Henley longed to stoop over her and kiss the full throat, in his pure, warm passion; but his heart misgave him. Blackbird drew a deep breath or two; her bosom rose and fell. She sighed as naturally as though no one were looking on. She was too modern, too weak, too frail to be

afraid of him. 'No, I don't often sleep,' she went on, as if two-thirds to herself. 'Mostly, now, I lie awake, and repeat those sweet lines from Andrew Lang's *Ballade*, that I set to music :

' " Shy dreams flit to and fro
With shadowy hair dispread ;
With wistful eyes that glow,
And silent robes that sweep.
Thou wilt not hear me—no ?
Wilt thou not hear me, Sleep ?"

But sometimes at last I doze off for an hour or two ; and then it's all so beautiful, so soft, so heavenly. Perhaps I may dream, and even dreams are delicious—for dream, too, is from Zeus, as Agamemnon says to Calchas, in the "*Iliad*." But oftener I fall asleep and lie like a log for an hour or two without knowing it at all—just the same as if I were dead ; and that's loveliest of everything. Perhaps the reason I love Sleep so well is because he seems to promise Death, too, will be gentle.'

‘Oh, don’t talk like that, Blackbird!’ Henley cried, clasping his hands together in genuine distress. ‘When you speak so it frightens me. At your age it isn’t natural.’

But Blackbird was now enjoying the one tremulous joy she really knew—that of pouring forth her sad soul like a nightingale in the woods to a sympathetic listener—and she wasn’t going to be balked of her amusement for so little.

‘Just think how delicious it would be,’ she went on, still dreamily, with eyes tight shut and head thrown back inert on the padded chair, ‘to lie down like this and grow drowsy, drowsy, drowsy; and be dimly conscious one need never wake up again, or move one’s tired limbs, or get bothered with thinking. How delicious to feel, without even knowing it, the grass growing green above one’s weary limbs; to rest on a bed one need never leave; to be at peace at last—all peace—and for ever!’

‘Blackbird!’ the young man said; ‘if you talk so, you’ll kill me!’

‘What a service I should be doing you!’ Blackbird answered, all at once opening her eyes, and gazing hard at him. ‘Don’t you think it’s one of the worst miseries of our life here on earth to be told from time to time how others have died—this one first, and then that one—and to remember all the while that years upon years may have to pass before ever we can follow them?’

Henley Stokes leaned across to her in genuine distress; but he changed the key suddenly.

‘Blackbird,’ he began in a very abrupt tone—he loved to repeat that name, now he had once summoned up courage to call her by it—‘don’t you want to be loved? Don’t you long, oh, ever so much! for someone to love you?’

To his immense surprise, Blackbird clenched

her hands hard, and sat upright in her seat with unexpected energy.

‘Long for it?’ she cried, a passionate wave surging over her pale face. ‘Hunger and thirst for it! Pine and die for it! From my babyhood upward, I’ve been yearning to be loved. I want somebody to sympathize with me, to pet me, to be fond of me!’

‘And now you’ve got it!’ Henley Stokes murmured slowly.

‘And now I’ve got it,’ Blackbird answered. (Was ever so strange a wooing?) She thrust her clenched little fists in her cheeks, and bit her lip till it bled. ‘Oh, you poor, poor soul!’ she cried; ‘what on earth can I say to you?’

‘Don’t you like me?’ the young man asked, bending over her.

‘Like you?’ Blackbird echoed. ‘If anyone will love me I could devour him, I could worship him! I could fall down before him

and let him trample me to death ! I could kill myself by slow torture for him !

Dimly even then, Henley Stokes was aware that, in the midst of these ardent protestations, true and heartfelt as they were, the poor child was thinking of herself all the time, not of him ; but he was too preoccupied for his own part with Blackbird's sorrows to be definitely conscious of that strange limitation.

‘And you'll love me ?’ he cried, his heart coming up into his mouth for joy. ‘Oh, say you won't refuse to let me love you ?’

‘Love you !’ Blackbird answered, clasping her hands on her knees and sitting up still to look straight at him. ‘Why, I can't help loving you. If a crossing-sweeper were to love me I must love him in return, I yearn so for sympathy. And *you*—I love you—oh yes ! Oh, ever so much ! I'm so grateful to you—so pleased with you.’

‘And I may take—just one,’ the young

man said, pleading hard and leaning forward tentatively.

At that movement, ever so slight, Blackbird drew back all abashed. The bare proposal seemed to shock her—nay, almost to frighten her. She trembled all over.

‘Oh no!’ she cried aghast. ‘Not that—that, never! I’m so grateful for your love; but you didn’t want—to *kiss* me!’

She said it with an accent of reproach—almost of positive disgust. But Henley Stokes was more human.

‘Well, yes, I did,’ he said stoutly, with the unregenerate simplicity of a flesh-and-blood young man. ‘That was just what I meant. I wanted to kiss you, Blackbird.’

The girl shrank back into the chair like one cowed.

‘Oh, you misunderstand!’ she cried, in an almost agonized voice. ‘I only meant I *loved* you. I didn’t mean I could *kiss*. Such things as that must never come in between us!’

It was Henley's turn now to draw back, astonished.

'But . . . I took this as a proposal,' he faltered out slowly, 'and . . . I thought . . . you accepted me. If we're to consider ourselves engaged—why, surely, surely, I ought to kiss you!'

'Engaged!' Blackbird repeated, in a tone of unutterable contempt. 'What? Engaged to be married! . . . Oh no, dear, dear friend! I never dreamt even of that. It's impossible. Impossible! Wholly, wholly impossible!'

'Why?' Henley Stokes asked, all trembling.

This riddle was too hard for him. What a grand creature she was, to be sure! He could never understand her.

Instead of answering him, Blackbird burst into a sudden flood of tears.

'Oh, I can't tell you to-day,' she sobbed out, holding his hand and rising. 'I'm so happy—so happy! So much happier than I ever was in my life before. Now I know

at last what happiness means. Don't let me kill it outright—don't let me spoil it by telling you why an engagement's impossible.'

And she rushed over to the piano, throbbing and sobbing like a child, and took refuge in a weird piece of her own melancholy music.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PATH OF DUTY.

THAT evening Ionê went back to town, and Owen was left by himself at the Red Cottage. He had a bad half-hour, as soon as she was gone, with his accusing conscience. And, what was worse, the bad half-hour lengthened itself out by degrees into a sleepless night, in the course of which Owen tossed and turned, and got no rest for his poor brain, thinking feverishly of the Cause, and Mr. Hayward betrayed, and bleeding Russia abandoned to her fate, and . . . Ionê Dracopoli's sweet smile of sunshine.

Yes, try as he would, he couldn't get Ionê Dracopoli's pretty face out of his head for a

minute. He knew it was wrong; but he couldn't help it. He was in love with Ionê, very deeply in love; but to what end could it lead? He was ashamed, himself, even to put the question.

For, as he lay awake there in his bed, running over his hazardous *rôle* in life, he was conscious of one wicked, one backsliding pre-occupation—he thought most now, not of betrayal to the Cause, but of rocks ahead for Ionê.

That was, in truth, the very head and front of his offending. He loved Ionê; but how could he ever hope, even in the dim future, to marry her? He oughtn't to have allowed himself to give way as he did to-day; their lips should never have met; those last fatal words of avowal should never have been spoken. For Ionê's sake, not for the Cause's; for this fresh Greek Circe was leading him on into a hopeless love affair. He could never marry anybody, he saw that quite clearly now.

His whole life was mortgaged. Just in proportion as he loved Ionê did the feeling grow stronger from hour to hour upon him that he could never ask any woman on earth to share his perilous fate with him. He must go through life with a halter round his neck ; he must tread the crumbling ash on the brink of a volcano. Any day he might be called upon to strike that blow for Russia, and success must mean death—a felon's death, amid the hushed, half-admiring execration of all civilized Europe. For himself that was nothing ; he had been accustomed to the idea in his own mind so long, and had heard its glories painted in such glowing colours by the man he most respected and revered on earth, that it had no greater terrors for him than the idea of active service has for the born soldier. But for Ionê—ah, that was different—how different, oh, how different ! Could he expose her to such a risk, such a strain, such a catastrophe ?

Happy, whole-hearted, easy-going English

lad that he was, he had sat constantly without one qualm on a barrel of gunpowder.

For the very first time in his life, however, on his bed that night, Owen thought the whole thing out to himself, quite definitely and in full detail. Let him get into the diplomatic service, for example, and be engaged to Ionê. Suppose, then, the chance — that supreme chance of his life to which he had been taught from childhood to look forward with eagerness — should arrive during the years while he was still waiting for Ionê. He clapped his hands on his eyes, pressing the pupils hard, and pictured the whole scene to himself vividly, graphically. He saw it unfold itself before his mental vision in long panorama as it might actually occur. He realized his mission with intense actuality.

He stood in a ballroom at Vienna, he would suppose, or no, in a great hall of the palace at Laeken, on the hill behind Brussels, some early summer evening. Principalities and

powers floated before his eyes, glittering with such garish decorations as the essentially barbaric royal mind delights in. Men in uniform clustered in groups with gay ladies in Court dress. He saw the glare of diamonds, the flash of scarlet facings. Aides-de-camp and chamberlains jostled page and lackey. At one end embodied Belgium stood, awkwardly regal, with All the Russias by his side, among a tinsel throng of blazing stars and orders. Every gewgaw that makes majesty for the vulgar mind contributed its part to that brave show — dress, feathers, swords, music, the loud blare of the band, the dazzling splendour of electric light, the pomp of sewer and seneschal, the powdered cheeks and scented bosoms of beautiful women.

And through the midst of it all, as in a prophetic haze, Owe saw himself strolling calmly in his Foreign Office uniform — an alien element, tall, broad-built, contemptuous,

looking down from his stately eminence of six feet two, as was his wont, on the surging mob of smaller folk around him. He crossed the floor again and again, with his easy gliding tread and a smile on his lips, stopping here to murmur a word or two in his purest Parisian to an ambassador's wife, or there to address a few guttural compliments to a high well-born countess or a serene altitude. Then, all of a sudden, a pause, a hush, a movement. All the Russias, star-bedizened, strides slowly down the midst, through a lane that opens deferential, spontaneous, automatic—a Queen Consort on his arm—there, before him, the enemy! . . . Owen stands by and sees the chance arrive. The victim passes close to him. Quick as thought, out with the sword—no tailor's toy, but a serviceable blade hanging trusty by his side—or else, still better, up with the avenging revolver from his waistcoat breast, and . . . crash . . . it buries itself in the

tyrant's bosom. Then a noise, a commotion, a rushing up on all sides. Blood gurgles from a wound, angry hands lie hard on the avenger's shoulder. Owen lets the revolver fall and stands, arms crossed, smiling scornfully. Let them do their worst now. Russia is vindicated, and Justice has wreaked her will on the chief executioner.

He had seen that picture before—more than once in his day-dreams—but never at all so clearly. He had watched the man drop; he had stood so, bolt upright, tall, strong, calm, triumphant, conscious of right on his side, a willing martyr to a great Cause, looking down with cold disdain on scared flunkeys around him. But never till to-night had he noticed so plainly blood oozing out of the wound, horrid filth on the floor, the terrified faces of pale women behind, the hateful physical accompaniments of a political assassination. He had thought of himself always till then as the central figure

of the scene—avenging democracy personified and victorious. To-night he was somehow more conscious of his victim as well, and though he recognised the man still as a criminal to be punished without fear or remorse, he remembered for the first time in his life that even an autocrat is human, built up of red blood and warm flesh, as *we* are.

But that wasn't the point, either, that made him pause the most. You may wonder at it, of course ; but consider his upbringing ! It was Ionê he thought of now. What would Ionê say of it ? Could he fancy himself so loving her, engaged to her, bound to her—yet committing that act, and bringing all that misery on her innocent head ? For see what it meant ! Ionê in London—Ionê walking down Victoria Street ! A placard at the crossing, laid flat on the muddy ground ! 'Assassination of the Czar,' in great, flaring, red letters ! She buys a paper, tears it open,

then and there, all trembling. That laughter-loving face grows white as death ; those plump hands quiver horribly. ‘Owen Cazalet, an *attaché* at the English Embassy. Cause of crime unknown. Suspected madness.’ She clutches the nearest railing with one hand for support. Owen caught and arrested ! So that’s the end of her cherished love-dream !

And then, a long trial. Accomplices, principals. Mr. Hayward, of Bond Street, a Russian Nihilist in disguise, in correspondence with the prisoner. All the world looks on eager. But where’s the glory of it now ? Who cares for martyrdom, who cares for death, who cares for duty, who cares for Russia free — if Ionê sits white in the crammed court, meanwhile, waiting pale as a corpse for that inevitable sentence ?

Execution ! Triumph ! And Ionê left miserable and heart-broken behind ! Oh, why did he ever meet her ? Why did he

ever allow himself that day to be dragged into it !

Take hands, and part with laughter ; touch lips, and part with tears. They two had touched lips, and this would be the upshot.

Or, perhaps, it might come later ; for Mr. Hayward had warned him never to count upon the chance as certain, or to seize it prematurely, but to watch and wait, watch and wait with patience, till opportunity brought occasion pat round at the one apt moment. He might have got on by then, let us suppose, and have married Ionê. But how marry any woman with such a hazard as that ever vaguely in store for her ? How jeopardize her happiness every day of one's life ? How trust her, even, to keep the awful secret, and not interfere to prevent the realization of his purpose ?

Mr. Hayward was right, after all. A woman's a delusion. Man should keep his

hands free to do the work that's set before him. How serve your country or your cause if you know success must mean red ruin and the breaking up of home to your wife and children, or to the girl who loves you? Better by far keep out of love altogether. But then—he hadn't kept out of it. Ionê had stormed his heart; and even while his head told him in very clear terms he owed it to her and the Cause to break all off at once, his heart was beating hard to the recurrent tune of 'Ionê, Ionê, Ionê, Ionê!'

She was so bright, so lovable, so exactly what he wanted. And Russia was so far away, and Ionê so near him.

Then suddenly the thought came across him—the wicked, traitorous thought—did he really want to kill the chief criminal at all? Were it not better to stop at home at his ease, and make love to Ionê?

Appalled at the ghastly temptation, he sat up in his bed, and cast it from him bodily.

He cast it from him, in the most literal and physical sense, with his two hands stretched out and his face averted. He cast it from him, horror-struck, with all the force of his strong young arms, and all the intensity of his inherited Russian nature. Get thee behind me, Satan! He rejected it and repudiated it as a young man, otherwise trained, might reject and repudiate the most deadly sin. Turn his back upon the Cause? Prove treacherous to his nurture and admonition in the faith? Disappoint all the dearest hopes of those who had been kindest and best to him? Oh, Mr. Hayward! Mr. Hayward! Perish the thought for ever! In an agony of remorse and shame the poor lad flung it away from him.

Yet it haunted him still, that instigation of the devil! From all sides it haunted him. The turning-point of youth had come—the critical age of doubt, of deliberation, of reconstruction, of resolution. Russia—the burning

wrongs of that tortured country ; his father's blood, that cried from the ground like righteous Abel's for vengeance ; his mother's face, wandering mad through the streets of Wilna ; the crowned and terrified abstraction that sat aghast, clutching hard, on its tottering throne—and, weighed against them in the balance, Ionê—Ionê—Ionê Dracopoli !

O God ! for light, for help, for guidance ! The young heart within him throbbed fierce with love. He rose, and paced the room, and lighted his candle in his agony. A photograph smiled down on him from the mantelpiece in front—smiled sunnily and innocently. He took it up and kissed it with hot, feverish lips. It was Mr. Hayward's portrait of Ionê in her Moorish costume. Mr. Hayward's—of Ionê ! There stood, as in one magnet, the two opposite poles of his oscillating devotion. Ionê—Mr. Hayward ; Mr. Hayward—Ionê.

Oh, Ruric Brassoﬀ, Ruric Brassoﬀ ! you said truly that day on the Morocco hills, ' Love is

a great snare'; and wisely, too, you said, 'Keep your head clear if you can, and let the Cause have the heart of you.'

But now Ionê Dracopoli had Owen Cazalet's heart, and the Cause—why, the Cause, as Owen would have phrased it himself, though it still had his head, was just nowhere in the running.

For it was no longer Russia, that bleeding, distracted country, that Owen balanced in the scale against Ionê's love; it was Mr. Hayward's aspirations. A cause, after all, is a very abstract entity, especially when you're only just turned one-and-twenty. But a person is a very different thing; and Owen loved Mr. Hayward. No son ever loved and revered his father as Owen loved and revered that earnest, austere, single-hearted Nihilist. He admired him with all his soul. He couldn't bear even to harbour a thought that might displease him.

For Mr. Hayward's sake he must go on and

persevere. He must . . . give up—O God ! he must give up——

But no—not even in word—he *couldn't* give up Ionê.

And so, on the rock between love and duty, as he understood those two, Owen Cazalet passed a night of unearthly struggle. Every throb of his pulse, every tick of the clock, seemed to oscillate in unison with those conflicting claims : Ionê—the Cause ; his own heart—Mr. Hayward.

One or other must go. What poor stuff for a martyr ! He felt his own great limbs in contemptuous self-judgment. To think he could be so weak, who was bred for a Nihilist !

CHAPTER XXIV.

PALTERING WITH SIN.

NEXT morning, early, Owen tubbed and dressed, bathed his eyes many times to look as fresh as possible, and came down to ask for breakfast half an hour before the usual time. He was going to run up to town, he said. He'd like to catch the 8.50.

Aunt Julia glanced hard at him, all old-maidish suspicion. She was accustomed to these sudden shocks, to be sure; and the worst of it was, though she might doubt the reason, she could never interfere lest it might, peradventure, prove to be one of that dreadful man's sealed orders.

‘To see Mr. Hayward?’ she asked, hesitating.

‘No,’ Owen answered, with a fervent promptitude which at once reassured her mind on that score at least. ‘*Not* to see Mr. Hayward.’

After which he shut his mouth close. It was an odious way the boy had. He’d picked it up, Aunt Julia thought, from that dreadful man himself. They were always so close, both of them, about their plans and their projects.

‘Where to, then?’ Aunt Julia ventured to inquire once more, after a long silence.

And Owen answered :

‘To Sacha’s.’

‘Oh!’ Aunt Julia replied.

It was the Oh argumentative and sub-interrogatory, not the Oh purely assentative ; it meant, ‘What to do, or whom to see?’

But Owen took no notice of it.

So after a discreet interval Aunt Julia tried again.

‘It’s odd you should go up to-day,’ she objected, ‘when you saw Sacha yesterday.’

‘Things have occurred since yesterday,’ Owen responded dryly.

This was too much for Aunt Julia. She opened her eyes wide at that oracular utterance.

‘How could they?’ she exclaimed in surprise. ‘Nobody’s come or gone. Why, even the post’s not in yet this morning.’

‘Things may occur in the night,’ Owen answered, somewhat gloomily; for how could he so much as speak of such high matters to Aunt Julia? ‘The vision of my head on my bed, perhaps. . . . I want to talk certain points over, anyhow, with Sacha.’

‘It isn’t Sacha you want to see, Owen, I’m afraid,’ Aunt Julia burst out severely, shaking one lifted forefinger. ‘It’s that other queer girl—the one that rides astride like a man, and frequents strange harems.’

‘But I saw Ionê, too, yesterday,’ Owen

answered, smiling grimly, for he loved to mystify her. 'I wonder, if it comes to that, you don't say Blackbird.'

Aunt Julia drew back, almost shocked.

'Well, I should hope you'd have the good taste to say nothing to *her*,' she observed with dignity. 'Not only are her views extremely unsound, but there's insanity in the family, of that I'm certain.'

'Insanity in the family?' Owen echoed. 'Why, who told you that, Aunt Julia?'

The prop of orthodoxy sat up very stiff as she answered, with some warmth:

'I saw it for myself. The girl's mad: I'm sure of it!'

'How do you mean?' Owen asked again.

'Why, you remember one day last year Sacha asked her down here for lunch?—oh, no! of course, you were with Mr. Hayward. Well, we went out in the afternoon, and up on the knoll till evening. As we were sitting by the summer-house, and I was talking to her

of her state, there was a very pretty sunset, and I saw, to my surprise, the girl was crying. "What's the matter, my dear? Is your heart touched?" I asked her. And she answered, "Oh no, Miss Cazalet! I'm only crying because the sunset's so beautiful." Well, she must be mad, you know, before she'd talk like that. And nobody has a right to fall in love with a girl who has insanity in the family.'

'People can't help falling in love sometimes,' Owen mused, smiling again that grim smile. And Aunt Julia stared hard at him. 'Not that I'm going to fall in love with poor little Blackbird,' he went on quickly, seeing Aunt Julia's brow darken. 'There's not enough of her, poor thing! for one to fall in love with. You may make yourself perfectly easy on that score. I should never even think of her.'

And he went on eating his porridge in gloomy silence.

The 8.50 train took him straight up to

Victoria, and ten minutes' walk landed him at the flat off Victoria Street. Ionê opened the door for him—she was the recognised housemaid. His heart came up into his mouth at sight of her; but he had made up his mind beforehand not to lean forward and kiss her; and he *almost* kept to it. The flesh, however, is weak. Ionê smiled at him so sweetly, and held her hand out so frankly, that as he took it the blood leapt to his face at the touch, and his heart beat wildly. Before he knew it, the man within him had done what he had sworn to avoid. His lips had touched hers, and he drew back all at once, abashed, ashamed, and penitent.

‘Where’s Sacha?’ he asked, holding his breath. ‘I came up to see her.’

‘Ah, family affection,’ Ionê answered, with laughing eyes, yet flushing red with pleasure. She took the kiss as her due, after yesterday, of course; but she was well pleased, none the less (as what woman wouldn’t be?) that Owen

couldn't rest one day without coming to see her. 'Sit down in the drawing-room here, Owen, and I'll run and fetch her.'

Owen followed where she led.

In the drawing-room Blackbird lounged lazily, as usual, in the long wicker chair, but still paler and whiter than her wont; while her eyes looked very red, as if from crying or sleeplessness. She rose as Owen entered, gave a distant little bow, and left the room precipitately. But the book she'd been reading lay open on the chair.

Owen took it up and glanced at it in a vacant sort of way, while Ionê was gone. He didn't observe it much, or pay any great attention to it. But the book was 'Maud'; and an orchid and a laurel-leaf were pressed at the point where Blackbird had been reading. The verse against which the orchid rested its petals was this :

'Oh, may the solid ground
Not fail beneath my feet,
Before my life has found
What some have found so sweet !'

Owen knew the lines well, and remembered the something they spoke of was love. But he never troubled to inquire why Blackbird had been reading them. A most pessimistic poem, only fit to give poor Blackbird gloomier views than ever. But young life is self-centred. The verses brought back to Owen—just himself and Ionê.

The orchid, he knew, must be one of Henley Stokes'. And as for the laurel-leaves, why, Blackbird was always messing about, Sacha said, with laurel-leaves in the laboratory. She wanted to extract 'poetic inspiration from them, perhaps, for her melancholy music. At any rate, she was always distilling, distilling, distilling away at them. It was love and death. But Owen didn't know it.

As he thought such things vaguely, Sacha came in to him from the studio, brush and palette in hand.

'You've disturbed me from my model, you bad boy!' she said, kissing him affectionately.

‘But never mind. I can see you’ve got something to talk to me about. Come into my sanctum, and I’ll go on working while I listen to you.’

‘But the model?’ Owen objected. ‘It’s very private. She’d listen.’

‘We can talk in Russian,’ Sacha answered quickly. ‘And that’ll be very appropriate, too, for the picture I’m working at is that sketch I spoke to you of—a sketch suggested by one of Kennan’s stories—“The Lost Girl in Siberia.”’

‘No!’ Owen cried in surprise. ‘How curious! How strange! Why, Sacha, that’s the very sort of thing I wanted to talk over with you!’

‘Not strange,’ Sacha answered in her calm voice. ‘Not at all strange, Owen—in me, especially. The Russian persists very strong in us both. And I was old enough to understand things, you know, when poor dear mamma——’

A sigh finished the sentence.

‘The Russian persists very strong in us both!’ Owen followed her into the studio. Yes, yes; Mr. Hayward had made it a religion to him that the Russian should persist, and the Nihilist, too. But was it really so strong? Or was it wearing out gradually?

In temperament, ay—he was Russian to the core, though with a very strong dash of English practicality and solidity as well; yet all Russian in his idealism, his devotion, his enthusiasm. But as to sentiment—well, more doubtful; his English training had made him in many things what he really was, and Mr. Hayward alone had encouraged the undeveloped Russian tendencies.

And now, since he knew Ionê, he felt more English than ever. He would have liked to settle down with Ionê to a quiet English life—if it were not for the fear of disappointing Mr. Hayward.

But to disappoint Mr. Hayward would be no light matter. It would be to blight the hopes of a life, to destroy at one blow a whole vast fabric of plans and schemes and visions.

He sat down in the studio chair.

Sacha explained to her model briefly that the gentleman spoke a foreign language, and she would work while she talked to him.

Owen leant forward and began.

Sacha, immovable as usual to the outer eye, stood up before her canvas, half facing him, half looking towards the model. The girl, scantily clad, cowered and crouched to keep warm in the imaginary snow. Sacha painted on, as if absorbed, while Owen spoke to her in Russian.

‘You know what happened yesterday?’ he began.

Sacha nodded, and put in a stroke at the child’s golden hair.

‘I could guess it,’ she answered shortly. ‘And, indeed, Ionê half told me. That is to say, when I teased her about it, she more than half admitted it.’

Then Owen explained the whole episode, in timid, bashful words, down to the very last touch about blowing up the Czar; and that, as in honour bound, he refrained from telling her.

But Sacha could guess it all the same, though she went on painting as if for dear life. She knew more than she said. Not much escaped Sacha.

When he’d finished she looked up.

‘Well?’ she murmured calmly.

‘I’ve had a sleepless night,’ Owen answered, stretching out his big arms and legs in an expressive fashion.

‘Thinking of Ionê?’ Sacha put in, though she knew it wasn’t that.

‘No; thinking of Mr. Hayward.’

For the first time the brush faltered in

Sacha's steady hand, and her breath came and went.

'He wouldn't like it, you think?' she said quickly. 'It would interfere . . . with his plans for your future?'

'Oh, Sacha, you know it would!'

Sacha fiddled away at the golden hair still more vigorously than ever.

'I've never been *told* so,' she answered, after a short silent interval.

'But you guess a great deal, I'm sure.'

'Yes—perhaps incorrectly.'

Owen felt this was painful.

'Well, anyhow,' he said, floundering, 'you can understand this much, if I married Ionê, or even got engaged to her . . . well, it would hamper me very much in the work he intends me for.'

'For the diplomatic service, in short,' Sacha put in diplomatically.

Owen eyed her with a start.

No word of the real truth ever passed be-

tween those two ; yet, even without speaking, they understood one another.

‘Yes,’ he answered very slowly, ‘in . . . the diplomatic service.’

‘On the ground that if . . . anything . . . ever happened to you——’ Sacha suggested, her hand now trembling so much that she hardly even pretended to paint at her picture.

‘Precisely. The diplomatic service, we know, is very exacting. One takes one’s life in one’s hand. And if anything . . . ever happened to me, what would one say to Ionê ?’

Sacha’s breath came and went. But she still pretended to paint.

‘Owen,’ she said slowly, touching each hair with a dry brush, and looking mechanically at the child, ‘I’ve often thought of all that. And ever since I’ve seen how much Ionê and you were taken with one another—why, I’ve thought of nothing else. It’s given me, too,

a sleepless night. It would be terrible—terrible.'

'Then, you guess *all*?' Owen asked.

Sacha bowed her wise head.

'Yes, all, I think. Everything. And it has troubled me much—even for *your* sake, Owen.'

'How do you mean?' he asked once more.

She looked across at him tenderly.

'It's hard to give up one's brother,' she said, faltering, 'even for a great and a holy and a righteous cause, Owen.'

'I suppose so,' Owen answered. 'Though, till now, I never thought of it. And even now, it's never of myself I think, of course. I'm too much of a Russian for that, I hope. It's of Ionê, on the one hand—and on the other, of Mr. Hayward.'

'It would kill him,' Sacha said, clenching her hand as she spoke.

'If I refused to—to go into the diplomatic service?' Owen corrected himself quickly.

‘But I’d never dream of *that*, Sacha. It would be wicked, unnatural.’

‘I’m not so sure as to its wickedness,’ Sacha replied, very white.

‘Why, Sacha, you know, I owe him everything.’

Sacha touched a hair or two with real paint.

‘If I were you,’ she said with decision, ‘I’d talk it all over with the person most concerned.’

‘Who? Mr. Hayward?’

‘Mr. Hayward! No, no, my dear boy—Ionê, Ionê!’

Owen drew back, all alarmed.

‘But—I’d have to tell her everything,’ he said.

‘She knows everything already.’

‘How can you tell?’

‘I feel sure of it. And she said so to you yesterday. I could see it in her face. Talk it over with *her* first, and then go and have it out with Mr. Hayward afterwards.’

Owen hesitated. In the night he had said to himself a thousand times he must never, never, never see Ionê again. And now, at the first shot, he was abandoning the citadel.

‘Where is she?’ he asked, faltering. Alas for the stuff a Nihilist should be made of!

‘In the kitchen, no doubt,’ Sacha answered. ‘Go out there and call her.’

And Owen, all on fire, feeling a consciousness of wild guilt, yet a burning delight that he might speak to Ionê, went out and called her.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN AWFUL SUGGESTION.

IONÊ, in her kitchen costume, was leaning over the fire, preparing the soup for lunch, as Owen entered. She looked up at him by the doorway with those merry, laughing eyes of hers.

‘Do you know,’ she said, pointing her remark with an impatient wave of her iron spoon, ‘this picnicking sort of life’s all very well for the East, or anywhere else you choose to try it out of England; but now the novelty’s begun to wear off a bit, I’m getting to believe it doesn’t go down in London. Even with Our Boys to help us, I really feel

before long—it's a confession of failure, I know—but—we must engage a kitchenmaid.'

'You think so,' Owen answered, without paying much heed to her words. 'That seems rather like rounding upon one's principles, doesn't it? Putting your hand to the plough and then looking back again.'

Ionê tasted the soup from her big spoon with a very critical air, and pouted her lips prettily.

'Well, there's a deal of backsliding about us all, I fancy,' she said with easy *insouciance*, pulling her kitchen apron straight—and how dainty she looked in it! 'You can't live up to anything worth calling principles in the world as it stands; the world's too strong for you. Individualism's all very well in its way, of course; but society won't swallow it. It isn't organized that way, and we must give in to the organization.'

'You mean it seriously?' Owen asked, now much interested by the curious way her obser-

ventions came pat with his own thoughts.
'You begin to believe in backsliding?'

Ionê took down a dredging-box from the dresser hard by, and proceeded to flour the loin of lamb on the table beside her.

'Well, partly I do, perhaps,' she said. 'And partly I'm still of the same old opinion. You see, the point's this : You can't dis sever yourself altogether from the social environment, as Blackbird calls it ; you've got, whether you like it or not, to live your life in your own century. It's dull, but it's inevitable. Now, when we first came here, Sacha and I'd got tired of the provincialism of living always in the nineteenth century, and we tried all by ourselves to inaugurate the twentieth or the twenty-first, or something. But somehow it doesn't seem quite to answer. The rest of the world still sticks to its own age most provokingly in spite of us. So *there* comes the difficulty. Of course, if everybody else did exactly as we do, there'd be nothing odd in

my running to open the door with my sleeves tucked up and my fingers all floury, or in Blackbird's being discovered with a dustpan in her hand, down on her knees on the floor sweeping the drawing-room carpet. But the bother of it all is, as things stand at present, we've got to run both concerns side by side, as it were—we've got to be servants at home and ladies in society.'

'It's a tax, no doubt,' Owen answered, putting off an evil hour. 'You'd like to be free this morning. Can't I help you at all, Ionê ?'

Ionê looked up at him with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

'Not in that nice black cutaway coat,' she replied, holding out her floury hands towards him and pretending to make clutches at his impeccable sleeves, 'unless you want the evidences of your guilt to be patent to every observer. They'll say, if you do, you've been flirting with the scullerymaid.' And she made

just a tiny dab of flour on his cuff by way of solemn warning. 'You see, there it is again,' she went on, bustling about the kitchen as she spoke, with Owen's admiring glance following her round at every turn as an iron filing follows a powerful magnet. 'That's the crux of the situation. You can't help in a kitchen and yet wear the ordinary black clothes of London respectability. Even Our Boys, whose frock-coats are the mirror of fashion of an afternoon in the Park, put on long holland smocks in the early morning when they come to crack the coals and light the kitchen fire for us.'

'I suppose you're right,' Owen assented, sighing. 'It's hard to have to live by two standards at once; hard to move in one world, and belong by nature and sentiment and opinion to another.'

'That's just what you're trying to do,' Ionê cried abruptly, pouncing upon him with a saucepan.

Owen paused and reflected.

‘I suppose it is,’ he said pensively.

Ionê went on washing out the enamelled inside with vigorous dabs and scourings.

‘Why, of course it is,’ she continued with much spirit. ‘You, even more than most of us. Almost everybody worth speaking of nowadays lives in one age and feels with another, some of us in front of our own, and some of us behind it. But *you* try to do more than that. You want to drive four systems abreast. For you’d like to live in two ages and belong to two countries—England and Russia, our century and the next; that’s the long and the short of it.’

‘I never told you so,’ Owen cried, turning pale. He loved to take refuge in that saving clause. At least, it could never be said he’d betrayed Mr. Hayward.

‘If women only found out what they’re told, my dear boy, they wouldn’t know much,’ Ionê responded cheerfully, giving another

twirl to the cloth inside the shining saucepan. 'But, seriously, you can't go on living this double life for always. It's not human nature. I lay awake a good bit last night, Owen'—her voice grew graver and softer—'and I thought a great deal about it.'

Owen's heart leapt up once more at those words. In spite of the flour and the saucepan he seized Ionê's hand hard.

'You lay awake in the night and thought about me, darling?' he cried, overjoyed. 'You really lay awake and thought about me?'

Ionê nodded and smiled.

'Why, of course I thought about you, you goose!' she answered. 'What do you think girls are made of? Do you suppose, after what happened yesterday, I was likely to fall asleep the very first moment I laid my head on my pillow?'

She looked at him so bewitchingly, with those soft, round cheeks so shamefacedly red in modest surprise at their own unwonted

boldness, that Owen couldn't help leaning forward and—just kissing her as she stood there. It was a bad beginning for a philosophical debate on the ethics of Nihilism. Ionê took the kiss sedately, as though it were but her due; yet she motioned him away with her hand all the same, as who should observe, 'That was all very nice in its way, no doubt, but no more of the same sort at present, thank you.' Then she turned to him suddenly, in a tumult of emotion, and nestled her fluffy head on his shoulder for very shame.

'Oh, Owen darling,' she cried with a burst, 'think about you? think about you? Why, I lay awake all night long and thought of nothing else but you—you, you, you—till it was light again this morning.'

Owen ran his fingers tenderly through that crisp loose hair of hers. Russia—the Cause! what were *they* to him now? Oh, Nature, Nature, why did you ever make women?

These temptations shouldn't be put upon our frail masculine hearts. He hadn't even the courage to answer outright that he, too, for his part, had lain awake all night and thought of her—and Mr. Hayward. He could only press her sweet face with one caressing hand into the hollow of his shoulder, while with the other he ran his fingers through those silky chestnut locks of hers. He was enslaved by the tangles of Neæra's hair. And he murmured under his breath, 'Ionê, I love you.'

For a minute or two they stood there—Owen, tall, strong, and erect; Ionê nestling against him in her womanly self-abandonment. Then, suddenly, she came to herself again, and moved away from him, all remorse and penitence for too open an avowal. She ran across the kitchen floor, blushing hot in the face as she went.

'Oh, Owen,' she cried, 'what'll you think of me? But I couldn't help it—I love you

so. . . . And I know what it was *you* lay awake and thought about.'

'What, darling?' Owen asked, following her up instinctively, and seizing her hand once more, as she turned her tingling face away from him.

'Why, you thought,' Ionê answered, pretending to be deeply interested in the saucepan once more, though her quivering hands belied their ostensible task—'you thought—you'd done wrong in ever speaking at all to me.'

Owen gazed hard at her and winced.

'It's desecration to say so, Ionê,' he cried, taken aback at her insight. 'But—I did. I admit it!'

'I know you did,' Ionê went on. 'I saw it in your eyes when I opened the door to you as you came this morning. You thought that horrid Russian man would be angry if he knew, and that you ought to have followed his wishes, and never fallen in love with me.'

Owen drew a deep sigh.

‘Not angry, Ionê,’ he answered. ‘If *that* were all, I think I could stand it more easily. But grieved, crushed, heartbroken—oh, I can’t tell you how utterly and inexpressibly disappointed!’

‘Only because you were in love with me, Owen,’ Ionê said, a bit reproachfully.

‘Ah, you can’t understand,’ Owen burst out, half despairing. ‘And I can’t even explain to you. I’ve no right. It’d be wicked of me—most wicked and ungrateful. You can’t think how much it means to Mr. Hayward, my darling; you can’t think how much it means to him—all his life-work almost. For twenty years he’s lived for little else but the plan, which—well, which my loving you would upset altogether. And I daren’t upset it. I can’t upset it. . . . Ionê, you won’t understand it, but I owe him so much! He’s brought me up, and sent me to school, and supplied all my wants, and been more than a father to me.

How can I turn upon him now, and say, "I love a woman, and for her sake I can't fulfil my engagements with you" ?

'And you mean to fulfil them ?' Ionê asked, growing suddenly grave and pale, for she realized now to the full what those terrible words meant. 'You mean—to blow up the Czar, and be shot, or hanged, or tortured to death for it ?'

Owen paused and reflected.

'I mean to fulfil whatever engagements I've made with Mr. Hayward,' he answered slowly and ruefully. 'And therefore I've done wrong in permitting myself ever to love you.'

Ionê let herself drop on a wooden kitchen chair, and laid her head in her arms on the rough deal table. For a moment she had given way, and was crying silently.

Owen let her go on, just soothing her head with his hand for some minutes without speaking.

At the end of that time she looked up and began again quite calmly. The womanish fit was over. Her tears had quieted her.

‘You’re going quite wrong,’ she said, with a firmness and common-sense beyond her years. ‘You’re letting a false sentiment of consistency lead you utterly astray. You’re sacrificing your life and mine to a mistaken idea of honour and gratitude.’

‘If only you knew Mr. Hayward, Ionê!’ Owen put in with a deprecating gesture.

‘If only I knew Mr. Hayward, I should say exactly what I say this minute,’ Ionê answered fervently. ‘Look here at it, Owen. This is just how things stand. You’re an Englishman born as much as anybody. You had a Russian father—well, I had a Greek one. It pleases us both to pretend we’re Russian and Greek; and so, no doubt, in inherited tendencies and dispositions we are; but for all practical purposes we’re pure English, for all that. You’re just a tall, well-made, handsome, athletic young

Englishman. You care a great deal more in your heart of hearts about a two-mile race than about the wrongs of Russia—though even to yourself, of course, you wouldn't like to acknowledge it. That dreadful Nihilist man—I admit he's very clever, very dignified, very grave, very earnest, and he knows your character thoroughly—but that dreadful Nihilist man has got hold of you, and talked you over to his ideas, and stuffed your inflammable Russian head—for your head at least is Russian—chock-full of his bombs and his dynamite and his enthusiasms, till not even your wholesome English legs and arms will carry you away out of reach of him intellectually. But you know very well it's all a factitious feeling with you. . . . Mr. Hayward's at the bottom of it. If Mr. Hayward were to die to-morrow you'd never want to do anything at all for Russia.'

'I hope I would !' Owen cried devoutly.

For was it not his religion ?

‘But so much, do you think?’ Ionê asked with a quick thrust, following up her advantage.

Owen hesitated.

‘Well . . . not *quite* so much, perhaps,’ he faltered out after a moment’s reflection.

‘No, of course not!’ Ionê continued, in a tone of feminine triumph. She was woman all over, which is another way of saying her transitions of emotion were intensely rapid. ‘Would you blow up the Czar, for example, all on your own account? Would you lay a plot to explode him? I, for one, don’t for a moment believe it.’

‘Probably not,’ Owen admitted, after another short pause of internal struggle. Somehow, Ionê compelled him to tell the truth, and to search out his inmost and most personal feelings in matters which he himself had long given over to Mr. Hayward’s supreme direction.

‘No, I knew you wouldn’t!’ Ionê echoed,

looking across at him and drying her tears. 'It's only your father confessor that drives you to these extremities. You've given him your conscience to keep, and you never so much as take it out to have a look at it yourself. But you're a man, Owen, now, and your manhood compels you to reconstruct your faith. The question is, Do you or do you not believe in this movement so much that you're prepared to sacrifice your own life and strength—and *me* into the bargain—to Mr. Hayward's schemes and Mr. Hayward's principles?'

She spoke it out plainly. Owen could not choose but listen. It was treason, he knew—high treason to the Cause, and yet, after all, very rational treason. There was plain common-sense in every word Ionê said. Why accept offhand Mr. Hayward's system of things as an infallible guide to moral conduct in a world where so many conflicting opinions bear sway alternately? Was Mr. Hayward

the Pope? Was Bond Street a new Vatican? But Mr. Hayward's money? And Mr. Hayward's kindness! Must he be ungrateful and base, and betray his great benefactor, all for the sake of that prime stumbling-block of our kind, a woman?

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CRISIS COMES.

WHEN you're in doubt whether you ought, as a matter of conscience, to marry a particular woman or not, I've always observed it's a dangerous practice, from the point of view of impartial decision, to take the doubt to that woman herself for solution. For either she cordially agrees with you, and, after many tears, endorses your scruples, in which case, of course, chivalry, pity, and a certain masculine pique compel you to fling your arms round her in a passion of remorse, and swear in spite of everything she must and shall be yours—and hang conscience ; or else she differs from you and dispels your

flimsy doubts, in which case, naturally, there's nothing on earth left for a man to do but agree with her and marry her. So that, let things turn as they will, your woman wins either way.

Now, this was precisely the dilemma for which poor guileless Owen had let himself in. All that autumn through, of course, he continued to argue with himself that 'twould be a grievous wrong in him to disappoint Mr. Hayward. Yet the more he argued it, the more possible such backsliding seemed to grow with each day. Depend upon it, there's nothing for weakening the hold of virtue on the mind like the constant determination that, in spite of everything, you *will* be virtuous. The oftener you declare to yourself you will never, never do so-and-so, the more natural and thinkable does the so-and-so become to you. And thus it was with Owen Cazalet. By Christmas time, indeed, he had all but made up his mind

that sooner or later he might have to tell Mr. Hayward his faith in the Cause was growing distinctly feebler.

As for Ionê, she aided him greatly whenever he saw her, in this terrible resolve—for to him it *was* terrible. She never missed an opportunity of pointing out to him over and over again that his zeal for Russia was, after all, entirely artificial—a delicate exotic, reared and nursed with difficulty on rough English soil, and ready to fade at the first chilly frost of our damp Western winter.

‘You’d never have arrived at those ideas at all, all of yourself, you know,’ she said to him more than once. ‘They’re nothing but mere reflections of Mr. Hayward’s enthusiasm. It’s natural enough in *him*, no doubt; he’s a Russian to the core—to the manner born—and he’s seen how the thing works in actual practice. Perhaps he’s been proscribed, hunted down, ruined, exiled to Siberia. He may have run away from the

mines, or escaped from prison. I don't owe him any grudge for wanting to blow up the Czar—I dare say the Czar deserves it—if he thinks that's the best way of clearing the board for a fresh deal, and especially if, as you say, he wants to blow him up out of pure brotherly love and affection for the down-trodden peasantry. I sympathize with all that very much, in a non-compromising sort of way, and at a safe distance. But that he should want to drag *you* into it—you, our own dear old Owen—that's quite another matter. You're as English as I am, you know, and, if it comes to that, a great deal Englisher. And you're a thousand times more interested in the champion sculls than in the wrongs of the Slav and the abominations of the Third Section. You'll never allow it, of course, but it's a fact for all that. The enthusiasm's pumped up; the athletics are genuine.'

Much dropping of water will wear away a

stone. Ionê was really, in her heart of hearts, far too deeply in love with Owen, and far too terrified for his future, not to push her advantage hard every time she met him. Sometimes she was sad, too, and let him see the reason why. How could any girl help being sad, she asked, no matter how joyous or vivacious her nature, when the being she loved best on earth was going straight his own headlong way to a murderer's grave or to the mines of the Ural?

Owen strongly demurred to that ugly word 'murderer'; he said it was a question-begging epithet, inapplicable to the minister of a political sentence against a notorious criminal. But Ionê, having once discovered by accident how hard it hit him, stuck to her phrase womanfully to the bitter end, and made it do good duty as a mental lever in her deliberate operations against Owen's tottering conscience—for conscience it was, though not of the common stamp. There

be creeds and creeds, and each creed begets its own appropriate moral sentiments.

Is it murder to shoot a Czar ? Or should we rather deem it a noble act of self-sacrifice for humanity's sake ? God knows : I don't ; and with the fear of the Lord Chief Justice for ever before my eyes, I refuse to discuss the question—at least in public. These matters, I hold, are best debated in camera. I may even venture to say, in camera obscura. Poor Herr Most got twelve months for deciding the abstract point at issue in the second of the two senses above considered. Twelve months in gaol, my medical authority assures me, would be bad for one's health ; and it would deprive one of the society of one's friends and family.

But to Owen, less well brought up, the struggle was a painful one. He had been taught to regard Mr. Hayward's opinion as the ultimate court of appeal in all questions of ethics. No Jesuit was ever more success-

ful in the training of neophytes than Ruric Brassoff had been with Owen Cazalet's conscience. Whether it be right or wrong to kill one man for the good of the people, Owen at least was quite as firmly convinced by his whole early training it was his bounden duty to shoot a Czar, wherever found, as he was firmly convinced it was wholly and utterly indefensible to shoot a grouse or a pheasant. He had been instructed by those whom he most revered and respected that to take life in sport, be it man's or beast's or bird's, be it Zulu's or Turcoman's, is a deadly sin; but that to take life for the protection of life and liberty, be it a scorpion's or a wolf's, be it a Czar's or a tiger's, is a plain and indubitable moral duty. No wonder, then, he clung hard to this original teaching, which supported for his soul the whole superimposed fabric of ingrained morality.

By Christmas, however, as I said before,

his mood had begun to weaken. He wasn't quite as firm in the Nihilist faith as formerly. Still believing without doubt in the abstract principle that Czars should be shot down, on every possible occasion, like noxious reptiles, he was a trifle less clear in his own mind than of old that *he* was the particular person specially called upon by nature and humanity to do it. A rattlesnake should be killed, no doubt, by whoso comes across him—say in South Carolina; but are you therefore bound to take ship to Charleston on purpose to find him? Must you go out of your way, so to speak, to look for your rattlesnakes?

Yes, if you've been paid for it, brought up for it, trained for it. Yes, if the path of duty lies clear that way. Yes, if you've engaged yourself by solemn contract to do it.

'But you were a minor at the time,' objects Ionê; 'you didn't know your own

mind. Now you've come to man's estate, you think it over at your leisure, and repudiate the obligation.'

Ah, yes ; but how return, not the money alone, but the pains, the care, the loving interest ? That was what bothered Owen now. The black ingratitude, the cruelty ! Above all, how break his change of mind to Mr. Hayward ?

From that ordeal he shrank horribly ; yet sooner or later, he felt in his soul, it must come. He began to see that clearly now. He had passed all the Foreign Office examinations with credit, and had further been excused his two years of residence abroad, as his knowledge of colloquial French was pronounced to be simply perfect ; and he was only waiting at present to receive his appointment. But how live in this hateful state ? It shamed him to take another penny of Mr. Hayward's money.

Early in January, however, an event

occurred which compelled him to hasten his decision one way or the other.

It was a foggy day in town. Black mist veiled all London. The lamps burned yellow. Carriages crawled slow through melting slush in Bond Street. The frost had paralyzed traffic along the main thoroughfares; and the practice of photography was suspended for the moment by thick gloom that might be felt in Mortimer and Co.'s studio.

As they lounged and bored themselves, a lady came to the door, who asked to see Mr. Hayward. She was a lady of a certain age, and of a certain girth, too, but still handsome and buxom with ripe, matronly beauty. The young woman with the tously hair, in the shop downstairs, passed her up languidly to the office. The young man in the office, twirling his callow moustache, remembered to have seen her before, and to have sent home her photographs to a

private room at the Métropole. It was difficult indeed for anyone to forget those great magnetic eyes. Madame Mireff, he recollected, the famous unaccredited Russian agent. So he showed her up to the sanctum with much awed respect. Was she not known to be some great one, acquainted with peers, nor unfamiliar with royalties?

Mr. Hayward sat at the desk, writing letters or making notes, as Madame Mireff entered. He rose to receive her with that stately civility of his younger Court life which twenty years of English shopkeeping had never yet got rid of. She took his hand with warmth; but his very manner, as he motioned her gracefully to the big easy-chair, warned Madame at once of the footing on which they were to stand in their interview to-day. No more of Ruric Brassoﬀ or of incriminating disclosures. She was a lady of rank; he was plain Mortimer now, the Bond Street photographer.

‘Good-morning, Madame,’ he said in French, leaning carelessly forward to scan her face close. ‘How well you’re looking! And how gay—how lively! That’s lucky for me. I can see by the smile on your face, by this air of general content, by this happy expression, you’ve succeeded in your object.’

Olga Mireff looked radiant indeed.

‘Yes,’ she answered with conscious pride, ‘I’ve been able to do something at last for our common country’—but she faltered as she spoke, for Mr. Hayward frowned. ‘I mean, that is to say . . . for your young friend,’ she added hastily, correcting herself, with that deep blush on her rounded cheeks that so well became her.

‘Better so,’ Mr. Hayward replied in a low voice. ‘Better so, Madame Mireff. You know my rule. *Minimise the adverse chances.* One compromising interview is more than enough already. To-day—we are official.’

Madame blushed and looked down again. The presence of the great man made that woman nervous, who never quailed in society before wit, or rank, or irony, or statesmanship. She fumbled her muff awkwardly.

‘I’ve mentioned your young friend’s name to Sir Arthur Beaumont, who knows his family,’ she said, stammering, ‘and to Lord Caistor, and others; and I’ve brought pressure to bear upon him from his own side of the House, and, what’s better at this juncture, from the Irish members. You know *ce cher* O’Flanagan—he’s my devoted slave. I put the screw on. Fortunately, too, young Mr. Cazalet had fallen in with one or two of the patriots, and impressed them favourably as a friend and champion of oppressed nationalities everywhere; and they gave him their influence. So the thing’s as good as settled now. Here’s what Lord Caistor writes——’

And she held out in one plump hand the Foreign Secretary’s letter.

Mr. Hayward took it, and read :

‘ DEAR MADAME MIREFF,

‘ It surprises me to learn you should think her Majesty’s Government could be influenced by motives such as those you allude to in making or withholding diplomatic appointments. Nothing but considerations of personal fitness and educational merit ever weigh with us at all in our careful selection of public servants. I am sorry to say, therefore, I must decline, even in my private capacity, to hold any communication with you on so official a subject. I am not even aware myself what selection may be made for this vacant post—the matter lies mainly with my under-secretary—nor would I allow Sir Arthur Beaumont to mention to me your *protégé’s* name, lest I should be prejudiced against him ; but you will find the announcement of the fortunate candidate in the *Gazette* at an early date. Regretting

that I am unable to serve you in this matter, I remain, as ever, with the profoundest respect,

‘Yours very sincerely,

‘CAISTOR.’

Mr. Hayward put the letter down with a deep sigh of relief.

‘Then he’s got the honorary attachéship at Vienna,’ he said, almost gasping. ‘Nowhere else could be better. It’s splendid—splendid!’

For those two knew well how to read and speak the diplomatic dialect.

Tears stood in the chief’s eyes. He brushed them away hastily. Tears stood in Madame Mireff’s. She let them roll down her cheek.

‘Have I done well?’ she faltered timidly.

And Ruric Brassoﬀ, seizing her hand, and pressing it hard in both his own, murmured in answer :

‘You have done well. You have deserved much of humanity.’

There was a moment’s pause. Then Madame rose and stood irresolute. Short shrift is the best rule in revolutionary affairs. She held out one trembling hand.

‘That’s all,’ she said regretfully, half longing to stop, half fearing to ask for respite.

And Mr. Hayward, inexorable, taking the proffered hand, answered in his mechanical business voice once more :

‘That’s all. No further now. I shall write to Owen to-day. . . . He’ll need two hundred pounds at once, of course, to enable him to take up so important an appointment.’

‘You would . . . permit me to supply it?’ Madame ventured to ask timidly.

The chief shook his head and smiled.

‘Keep your money,’ he answered, in a cold tone of command. ‘I have no need for it now. Funds are plentiful at present.’

You offer too freely, Madame. When I require aught from any of you, rest assured, I shall ask for it.'

He rose and motioned her out with princely dignity. For a second he held the door ajar, and spoke in English, audibly, as he bowed dismissal.

'I regret very much,' he said, 'we should have misunderstood your instructions. No more of the platinotypes shall be exposed for sale till we've altered the inscription. I apologize for our mistake. We'll withdraw them altogether, in fact, if you think them in any respect unworthy our reputation.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

OWEN DEBATES.

AT Moor Hill next morning Owen was busy at his favourite winter pastime of boxing a stuffed sack suspended from a beam, when the postman entered. His room overlooked the garden gate, and his imaginary opponent dangled sideways to the light not far from the window, so he commanded the situation, even while busily engaged in his punching and pummelling. As a man of peace, indeed, Owen disapproved of boxing, except with gloves and muffle; but from the point of view of pure exercise, he delighted in the muscular play of it, and was an expert in the art, as in so many other branches of athletic practice. He had just dealt his swinging

antagonist a vigorous blow between the eyes, which sent him reeling into space, when he caught sight from afar of a certain square blue envelope in the postman's hand of a most familiar pattern. He knew it at a glance. It was the business envelope of Mortimer and Co., photographers, in Bond Street.

In a tumult of expectancy he rushed down to the door, in jersey and drawers as he stood, his strong arms all sleeveless, and his brawny neck all bare, to Aunt Julia's infinite horror, on grounds alike of health and of modesty.

'You'll catch your death of cold one of these fine winter days, going to the door like that in bitter frosty weather.'

He took the note from the postman's hands and tore it open hurriedly. Yet so deeply was respect for Mr. Hayward ingrained in the young man's nature that he laid the mere envelope down on the table with reverent care, instead of tossing it into the

fire at once, as was his invariable wont with less sacred communications. As he read it, however, his face flushed hot, and his heart fluttered violently. Oh, what on earth should he do now? A bolt from the blue had fallen. He stood face to face with his grand dilemma at last. He must cast his die once for all. He must cross—or refuse to cross—his dreaded Rubicon.

‘MY DEAR OWEN,’ Mr. Hayward wrote, ‘I have good news for you to-day, after long, long waiting. An influential friend of mine—one of our own, and most faithful—has just informed me your appointment’s as good as made, the attachéship at Vienna. It’ll be gazetted at once, so Lord Caistor implies, and probably by the same post with this you’ll receive the official announcement. Come up to town direct, as soon as ever it reaches you, and bring the Foreign Office letter along in your pocket. I’ve placed two

hundred pounds to your credit at once at Drummonds, Coutts and Barclay's, and have asked them at the same time to let you have a cheque-book. But I must take you round there when you run up, to introduce you to the firm, and to let them see your signature. For the rest, *attachés*, as you know, get nothing at all in the way of salary for the first two years; so you must look to me for an allowance, which I need hardly say will be as liberal as necessary. I can trust you too well to fear any needless extravagance on your part. On the contrary, what I dread most is too conscientious an economy. This you must try to avoid. Live like others of your class; dress well; spend freely. Remember, in high posts much is expected of you. But all this will keep till we meet. On your account, I'm overjoyed. Kindest regards to Miss Cazalet.

‘Your affectionate guardian,

‘LAMBERT HAYWARD.’

This letter drove Owen half frantic with remorse. 'Good news for you to-day'—'overjoyed on your account'—above all, 'in high posts, much is expected of you.' The double meaning in that phrase stung his conscience like a snake. Much was expected, no doubt; oh, how little would be accomplished!

'May I look?' Aunt Julia asked, seeing him lay the note down with a face of abject despair.

And Owen, in his lonely wretchedness, answered:

'Yes, you may look at it.'

It was intended for the public eye, he felt sure—an official communication—else why that uncalled for 'Kindest regards to Miss Cazalet'?

Aunt Julia read it over with the profoundest disapprobation.

'Vienna!' she cried, with a frown. 'That's so far off! So unhealthy! And in a Catholic

State, too ! And they say society's loose, and the temptations terrible. Not at all the sort of Court that *I* should have liked you to mix with. If it had been Berlin, now, Owen, especially in the dear, good old Emperor's days—he was such a true Christian !

And Aunt Julia heaved a sigh. Vienna indeed ! Vienna ! That wicked great town ! She remembered Prince Rudolph.

‘It's awfully sudden,’ Owen gasped out.

Wonder seized Aunt Julia. Though not very deep, she was woman enough to read in his pallid face the fact that he was *not* delighted. That discovery emboldened her to say a word or two more. A word in season, how good it is !

‘And that certainly isn't the way a person of mature years ought to write to a young man,’ she went on severely. ‘Just look at this : “Live like others of your class ; dress well ; *spend freely*.” Is that the sort of advice a middle-aged man should offer his

ward on his entrance into life? "Dress well; *spend freely*." Disgraceful! Disgraceful! I've always distrusted Mr. Hayward's principles.'

'Mr. Hayward understands *character*,' Owen answered, bridling up. As usual, Aunt Julia had defeated her own end. Opposition to his idol roused at once the rebellious Russian element in her nephew's soul. And, besides, he knew the compliment was well deserved, that too conscientious economy was the stumbling-block in his case. 'I shall go up to town at once, I think, without waiting to get the official letter.'

'Mr. Hayward won't like *that*,' Aunt Julia put in, coming now to the aid of what was, after all, duly constituted authority.

Owen was too honest to take refuge in a subterfuge.

'I didn't say I'd go to Mr. Hayward,' he answered. 'There are more people than one in London, I believe. I said, to London.'

‘Where *will* you go, then?’ Aunt Julia asked, marvelling.

And Owen answered, with transparent evasiveness :

‘Why, to Sacha’s, naturally.’

On the way up, the last struggle within him went on uninterrupted. They were front to front now ; love and duty tooth and nail. He grew hot in the face with the brunt of the combat. There was no delaying any longer. He *couldn’t* accept Mr. Hayward’s two hundred pounds. He *couldn’t* take up the diplomatic appointment. He *couldn’t* go to Vienna. Black ingratitude as it might seem, he must throw it all up. He must tell Mr. Hayward point-blank to his face it was impossible for him now and henceforth to touch one penny more of Nihilist money.

Owen had doubts in his own mind indeed, if it came to that now, as to the abstract rightfulness of political assassination. Time works

wonders. Love is a great political teacher. As fervently Russian and as fervently revolutionary in conviction as ever, he was yet beginning to believe in educating Czars out instead of cauterizing them with dynamite. It was a question of method alone, to be sure, not of ultimate object. Still, method is something. Not only must the wise man see his end clearly; he must choose his means, too, with consummate prudence. And Ionê's arguments had made Owen doubt, even against Mr. Hayward's supreme authority, whether shooting your Czar was the best possible means of utilizing him for humanity. How much grander, how much more impressive, it would be, for example—to convert him! That was a splendid idea. What a vista opened there! But Mr. Hayward? His heart sank again. Mr. Hayward wouldn't see it.

Arrived at the flat off Victoria Street, he didn't even go through the formality of

asking for Sacha. He flung himself, full face, into Ionê's arms, and cried out in the bitterness of his soul :

‘ Oh, Ionê, Ionê, I’ve got my appointment.’

Ionê took his kiss, and started back in dismay. Her face went very white. She didn’t pretend to congratulate him.

‘ Then the crisis has come,’ she said, trembling. ‘ You must decide—this morning.’

Owen followed her blindly into the drawing-room, and handed her the letter to read. She took it in mechanically. Then she let her hand drop by her side, with the fatal paper held loose in it.

‘ And *what* will you decide?’ she asked, cold at heart and sobbing inwardly.

‘ What *must* I, Ionê ?’

The girl shook like a leaf in the wind.

‘ It’s for you to say, Owen,’ she answered. ‘ Don’t let *me* stand in your way—or Russia’s either. What am I that you should doubt ? Why make me an obstacle ? You may be

secretary in time—envoy—minister—ambassador.'

'Or Russia's either,' Owen repeated, musing, and seizing her hand, more in doubt than in love, just to steady himself internally. 'Oh, darling, I'd have thought it treason even to think so once. But it's horrible, it's wicked, it's inhuman of me to say it; Ionê, for your sake, rather than cause your dear heart one moment's pain, I'd—I'd sacrifice Russia.'

'It *isn't* inhuman,' Ionê answered, flushing red in a sudden revulsion of feeling from despair to hope. 'It's human, human, human—that's just what it is; it's human.'

Owen held her hand tight. It seemed to give him strength.

'Yes, Russia,' he said slowly. 'I could sacrifice that; but Mr. Hayward—Mr. Hayward!'

'Obey your own heart,' Ionê answered; but she pressed his hand in return with just the faintest little pressure. 'If it bids you

do so, then sacrifice me, by all means, to Mr. Hayward.'

'Ionê !'

He looked at her reproachfully. How could she frame such a sentence? Surely she knew it was duty, and, oh! so hard to follow.

Ionê flung herself upon his shoulder, and burst wildly into tears.

'Darling,' she cried, sobbing low, 'I don't want to influence you against your conscience and your convictions. But how can I give you up to such a dreadful future?'

Owen felt it was all up. Her arms wound round him now. Could he tear himself away from them and say in cold blood, 'I will go to my death, where duty calls me'?

That was all very well for romance; but in real, real life Ionê's tearful face would have haunted him for ever. Very vaguely, too, he felt, as Ionê had said, that to yield was human. And what is most human is

most right ; not Spartan virtue, but the plain dictates of our common inherited emotion. That is the voice of nature and of God within us. Those whom we love and those who love us are nearer and dearer to us by far than Russia. Supreme devotion to an abstract cause is grand—in a fanatic ; but you must have the fanatic's temper, and fanaticism roots ill in so alien a soil as the six feet two of a sound English athlete.

He clasped her in his strong arms. He bent over her and kissed her. He dried her bright eyes, all the brighter for their tears.

‘ Ionê,’ he cried, in decisive accents, ‘ the bitterness of death is past. I’ve made my mind up. I don’t know how I’m ever to face Mr. Hayward. But sooner or later, face him I will. I’ll tell him it’s impossible.’

‘ Go *now*,’ Ionê said firmly. ‘ Strike while the iron’s hot, Owen.’

The very thought unnerved him.

‘But what shall I say about the money I’ve had—the schooling—the care?’ he asked, pleading mutely for delay. ‘He’s done so much for me, darling. He’s been more than a father to me. It’s too terrible to disillusion him.’

Ionê stood up and faced the falterer bravely.

‘You oughtn’t to let him wait one minute longer, then,’ she said with courage. ‘Undeceive him at once. It’s right. It’s manly.’

‘You’ve touched it,’ Owen answered, driven to action by the last word. ‘If I’ve got to do it, I must do it now. Before the appointment’s made. I mustn’t let them gazette me.’

Ionê drew back in turn, half afraid.

‘But your future?’ she cried. ‘Your future? We ought to think about that. What on earth will you do if you refuse this attachéship.’

Owen laughed a grim little laugh.

‘We can’t afford to stick now at trifles

like *that*,' he said bitterly. 'If I'm to give up this post, I must look out for myself. I'm cast high and dry—stranded.' He glanced down at his big limbs. 'But, anyhow,' he added with a cheerful revulsion, 'I can break stones against any man, or sweep a crossing.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

ON any other day Owen would have taken a cab to Bond Street. This morning he walked, though with fiery haste. For every penny he spent now was Mr. Hayward's and the Nihilists'. So it had always been, of course, but he felt it ten thousand times more at present. The dead weight of his past debt hung round his neck like a millstone. Not for worlds would he have increased it, as things stood that day, by a twopenny omnibus fare.

Mr. Hayward met him at the door of the photographic sanctum, and grasped his hand warmly. The pressure went straight to Owen's heart like a knife. If only he had

been cold to him ! But this kindness was killing.

‘ Well,’ the elder man said, beaming, and motioning his ward into a chair with that princely wave of his ; ‘ they’ve been prompt about the announcement, then. You got the official note by the same post as my letter ?’

Owen’s tongue misgave him. But he managed to falter out, with some little difficulty :

‘ No, it hasn’t come yet, Mr. Hayward. I — I wanted to anticipate it.’

The chief’s face fell.

‘ That was not in my orders, Owen,’ he said with inflexible gravity. ‘ What a stumbling-block it is, this perpetual over-zeal ! How often shall I still have to warn my most trusted subordinates that too much readiness is every bit as bad and as dangerous as too little ?’

‘ But that wasn’t it, Mr. Hayward,’ Owen answered as well as he could. ‘ I had a

reason for anticipating the official announcement. I desired to prevent the gazetting of the appointment. I may as well tell you all first as last——’ He was shaking like a jelly. ‘Mr. Hayward—oh, I can’t—yet I must——. This is terrible.’ He blurted it out with a gulp. ‘I don’t mean to go at all into the diplomatic service.’

The shock had not yet come. Mr. Hayward, gazing blankly at him, failed to take it all in. He only looked and looked, and shook his head slowly as in doubt for a minute. Then he ejaculated, ‘Afraid?’ in very unemotional accents.

The word roused Owen’s Cazalet’s bitterest contempt.

‘Afraid!’ he cried, bridling up in spite of his grief and remorse. ‘Afraid! Can you think it?’ And he glanced down involuntarily at those fearless strong hands. ‘But I have doubts in my own mind as to the rightfulness of the undertaking.’

Mr. Hayward looked through him, and beyond him, as he answered as in a dream :

‘Doubts—as to the desirability of exacting punishment upon the chief criminal?’

‘Doubts as to how far I am justified—an Englishman to all intents and purposes, and a British subject——’

‘In avenging your father’s death,’ Mr. Hayward cried, interrupting him, ‘your mother’s madness, your sister’s exile, Owen Cazalet ; Sergius Selistoff, is *that* what you mean ? You turn your back now on the Cause, and on martyred Russia?’

His expression was so terrible, so pained, so injured ; there was such a fire in his eye, such a tremor in his voice, such an earnestness in his manner, that Owen, now face to face with the cherished and idolized teacher, and away from Ionê, felt his resolution totter, and his knees sink under him. For a moment he paused ; then suddenly he broke forth, this time in Russian :

‘Lambert Hayward,’ he said, using the familiar Russian freedom of the Christian name, ‘I *must* speak out. I *must* explain to you. For weeks and weeks this crisis has been coming on, and my mind within me growing more and more divided. I’m a man now, you see, and a man’s thoughts rise up in me, and give me doubt and disturbance. Oh, for weeks, for your sake, I’ve dreaded this day. I’ve hated the bare idea. I’ve shrunk from telling you. If it hadn’t been for this special need I could never, I believe, have made up my mind to tell you. I wish I could have died first. But I can’t—I can’t go into the diplomatic service.’

Mr. Hayward gazed at him still, riveted in his revolving chair, with glassy eyes like a corpse, and white hands, and rigid features. The change that was coming over him appalled and terrified Owen. He had expected a great shock, but nothing so visible, so physical as this. Mr. Hayward nodded his

head once or twice like an imbecile. Then with an effort he answered in a very hollow voice :

‘For *my* sake, you say, only for *my* sake, for *mine*. But how about Russia—holy martyred Russia?’

Owen felt, with a glow of shame, that in the heat of the moment he had wholly forgotten her.

But he didn’t wound his friend’s feelings still more deeply than he need by admitting that fact.

‘I would do much for Russia,’ he said slowly, ‘very much for Russia.’

‘You ought to,’ Mr. Hayward interjected, raising one bloodless hand, and speaking in the voice of a dying man, ‘for you owe everything to her—your birth, your blood, your fine brain, your great strength, your training, your education, your very existence in every way.’

‘Yes, I would do much for Russia,’ Owen

went on, picking his phrase with difficulty, and feeling his heart like a stone—for every word was a death-knell to Mr. Hayward's hopes—'if I felt certain of my end, and of the fitness and suitability of my means for producing it. But I've begun to have doubts about this scheme for—for the punishment of the chief bureaucrat. I'm not so sure as I once was I should be justified in firing at him.'

For a second the old light flashed in Mr. Hayward's eyes.

'Not certain,' he cried, raising his voice to an unwonted pitch—but they were still speaking Russian—'not certain you would be justified in striking a blow at the system that sent your father to the mines and your mother to the madhouse? Not certain you would be justified in punishing the man who sits like an incubus at the head of an organized despotism which drives the dear ones whom we love to languish in the cells of its

central prisons, and wrings the last drop of red heart-blood daily from a miserable peasantry? An Englishman, you say, and a British subject. How can you be happy here, in this land of exile, while in the country where you were born people are dying of hunger by the hundred at a time, because a Czar snatches from them their last crust of bread, and confiscates the very husks under the name of taxes? Is it right? Is it human? Owen Cazalet—Sergius Selistoff—you break my heart—I'm ashamed of you!

Mr. Hayward ashamed of him! Owen bent down his head in horror and remorse. His friend's words went right through him like a keen sharp sword. For the worst of it all was, in the main, he admitted their justice. He, a Russian born, son and heir of a Russian martyr, nursed on Nihilist milk, fed on Nihilist bread, reared with care by the great head of the Nihilist Cause in England—how could he turn his back now upon

the foster-mother faith that had suckled and nurtured him? If only he could have kept to his childish belief! if only he could have drunk in all those lessons as he ought! But, alas! he couldn't. Take it how you will, no good Nihilist can be reared on English soil. You need the near presence of despotism in bodily form, and the horror it awakens by direct revulsion, to get the conditions that produce that particular strain. Such organisms can evolve in no other environment. Ashamed and disgraced and heart-broken as he felt, Owen *couldn't* have fired one shot at a concrete Czar if he'd seen him that moment.

He may have been right. He may have been wrong. But facts are facts; and at any rate, he *couldn't*.

He gazed at Mr. Hayward in an agony of remorse. Then he hid his face in his hands. The hot tears ran down his cheek, big strong man as he was.

'Oh, this is terrible,' he said—'terrible!

It cuts me to the heart, Mr. Hayward, that I must make you so miserable.'

The white-faced chief stared back at him with a stony pallor on those keen, clear features.

'Make *me* so miserable!' he cried again, wringing his numbed hands in despair. 'Every time you say that you show me only the more how little the Cause itself has ever been to you.' He seized his ward's hand suddenly. 'Owen Cazalet,' he exclaimed, gazing hard at it, 'listen here; listen here to me. For twenty years, day and night, I've had but one dream, one hope, one future. I've lived for the day when that great strong hand of yours should clutch the chief criminal's throat, or bury a knife in his bosom. . . . For twenty years—twenty years, day and night, one dream, one hope, one future. . . . And now that you break it all down with a single cruel blow—not wholly unexpected, but none the less cruel and crushing for all that—is it

of myself I think—of my ruined life—of my blasted expectations? No, no, I tell you, no—ten thousand times no; I think only of Russia—bleeding, martyred Russia. I think how she must still wear the chains *you* might have struck off her. I think how her poor children must sicken, and starve, and die, and languish in gloomy prisons or in stifling mines, because *you* have been untrue to your trust and unfaithful to your promise. I think but of her—while *you* think of *me*. Let my poor body die, let my poor soul burn in burning hell for ever; but give freedom, give life, give hope, and bread, and light, and air, to Russia.'

As he spoke his face was transfigured to an unearthly beauty Owen had never before seen in it. The enthusiasm of a lifetime, crushed and shattered by one deadly blow, seemed to effloresce all at once into a halo of martyrdom. The man was lovely as one has sometimes seen a woman lovely at the moment

of the consummation of a life-long love. But it was the loveliness of despair, of pathetic resignation, of a terrible, blighting, despondent disillusion.

Owen gazed at him, and felt his own heart grow cold like a stone. He would have given worlds that moment to feel once more he hungered and thirsted for the blood of a Czar. But he didn't feel it, he couldn't feel it, and he wouldn't pretend to it. He could only look on in silent pity and awe at this sad wreck of a great hope, this sudden collapse of a life-long enthusiasm.

At last Mr. Hayward spoke again. His voice was thick and hard.

'Is it this girl?' he asked with an effort—
'this Ionê Dracopoli?'

Owen was too proud to tell a lie, or to prevaricate.

'It is,' he said, trembling. 'I've talked it all over with Ionê for weeks, and I love her dearly.'

The chief rose slowly, and groped his way across the room towards the bell like a blind man.

‘Talked it over with Ionê!’ he cried aloud. ‘Talked it over with a woman! Betrayed the Cause! divulged the secret! Owen Cazalet, Owen Cazalet, I would never have believed it of you!’

Half-way across the room he stopped and groaned aloud. He put his handkerchief to his mouth.

Owen rushed at him in horror. It was red, red, red. Then he knew what had happened. The strain had been too much for Mr. Hayward’s iron frame. God grant it hadn’t killed him! He had broken a blood-vessel.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEGINNING AFRESH.

IN a very few minutes a doctor was on the spot. Large blood-vessel on the lung, he said. It might, of course, be serious. Patient mustn't on any account go down to Ealing, where he lived, that night. Would it do, Owen asked, to take him round in a hansom to a flat near Victoria Street? The very thing, the doctor answered. Only carry him up the stairs. So in less than half an hour the phalanstery was increased by a new member, and Mr. Hayward found himself comfortably tucked up in Ioné's pretty bed with the cretonne curtains.

Oh, irony of fate ! And Ionê was the Eve who had ruined Russia !

He remained there a week, and Owen stopped on with him. Ionê and Blackbird shared a bedroom together meanwhile ; but Owen slept out at a house round the corner, spending the day and taking his meals all the time with the community. There was no lack of nurses, indeed. Owen himself was assiduous, and Mr. Hayward, in spite of his deep despondency, still loved to have his pupil and ward beside him. It pleased him a little, very little, to see that, even if Owen had fallen away from his first love for Russia, he retained none the less his personal devotion to his friend and instructor. Then there were Ionê and Sacha and Blackbird as well, all eager to attend to the sick man's wants ; for strange to say, now the worst, as she thought, was over, Ionê felt no repugnance at all to the terrible Russian who had been so long her bugbear ; on the con-

trary, in her womanly way, she really pitied and sympathized with him. And Mr. Hayward, though he regarded Ionê as the prime mover in the downfall of his life-long hopes, yet felt very strongly her personal fascination; so strangely constituted are we, so complex, so many-stranded, that, as he loved Owen himself, so he couldn't help loving Ionê too, because she loved Owen, and because Owen loved her. In the vast blank left by the utter collapse of that twenty-year scheme of his, it was some faint comfort to him to feel that loving hands at least were stretched out without stint to soothe and console him.

As for Sacha, she had always respected and venerated Mr. Hayward almost as much as Owen himself did; on her he had claims of gratitude in many, many ways; she remembered him as the kind friend of their early days, the one link with her childish life, the brave ally of their mother in her

darkest hours, the preserver who had saved them from the cruel hand of Russian despotism. And the grave, solemn earnestness of the man told also on her calm but profoundly impressionable Slavonic nature. Mr. Hayward, in fact, struck a chord in Sacha's being which no mere Western could touch. She felt herself akin to him by the subtle link of ethnical kinship.

On the second morning of his illness, when Mr. Hayward, more conscious now, was just beginning to reawake to the utter nothingness of his future, a ring came at the electric bell, which Ionê ran to answer. Blackbird was sitting just then by the sick man's bedside, singing soft and low to him a plaintive song of her own composing. It was a song about how sweet 'twould be these cramping bonds to sever, to lie beneath the soil, free from earth's care and moil, life's round of joyless toil, and sleep one dreamless sleep for ever. At that moment, on the last

line, the bell rang sharp, and Ionê, who had been seated at the other side of the bed, holding her enemy's hand in her own, and soothing it gently with those plump, round fingers, jumped up in haste at the familiar summons to the door, and ran out to open it.

As she opened it, she saw a lady of mature but striking beauty, with large magnetic eyes, which she seemed vaguely to recollect having seen before somewhere. Then it came back to her all at once—Lady Beaumont's At Home—the Russian agent, that dreadful Madame Mireff! The spy! the spy!—what could *she* be wanting here at such an untoward moment?

In one second Ionê was a Nihilist full fledged. An emissary of the Czar come so soon on the prowl after our Mr. Hayward (for she adopted him on the spot as part and parcel of the phalanstery). This was abominable, shameful! But she rose to the occasion. You must treat spies as spies; meet lies with

lies ; trump treachery with trickery. At that instant Ionê, born woman that she was, would have put off Madame Mireff with any falsehood that came handy, rather than admit to the Czar's agent the incriminating fact that they were harbouring a hunted and persecuted Nihilist. He might have wanted to send Owen to his death, no doubt ; and for that she could hate him herself—it was her right as a woman ; but no third person, above all a Russian spy, should ever get out of her, by torture or treason, by force or fraud, by wile or guile, the very faintest admission of Mr. Hayward's presence.

Madame Mireff, however, smiling her very friendliest smile—oh, how Ionê hated her for it, the serpent, the reptile !—handed her card very graciously to the indignant girl. Ionê darted an angry glance at it—‘ Madame Mireff, Hôtel Métropole.’ At least, then, the creature had the grace to acknowledge

openly who she was—to put the whole world on its guard against her as a Russian detective.

‘Oh, Miss Dracopoli,’ Madame said, in her softest voice, flooding Ionê with the light of those lustrous eyes, ‘I recollect you *so* well. I had the pleasure, you know—Lady Beaumont’s, you remember.’ Ionê just nodded an ungracious assent, as far as that head and neck of hers could make themselves ungracious. ‘Well,’ Madame went on, divining her inmost thought, and still bent on fascination, ‘I come to-day as a friend. You’ve no need to be afraid of me. I won’t ask whether Mr. Hayward’s here, for I know you’ll tell me he isn’t—I see that in your eyes; but will you take in my card and be so kind as to show it to everybody in the house?—for some of them, I believe, might be glad to see me.’

‘There’s no Mr. Hayward here,’ Ionê answered boldly, looking straight in her

visitor's eyes, and telling her a lie outright, with a very bold face, as any good woman and true would tell it in the circumstances. 'There's only ourselves — just the regular family. Miss Braithwaite you don't know. And as for Owen and Sacha, I'm sure they never want, as long as they live, to meet you.'

It wasn't polite, but it was straight as a die, for Ionê's one wish was to keep the Russian spy from entering the premises.

Madame Mireff, however, sympathized with the girl's feelings too well not to be thoroughly prepared for this sharp reception. She smiled once more, and once more tried all her spells (in vain) on Ionê.

'My child,' she said kindly, 'you're mistaken—quite mistaken. I come as a friend. I ask for no one. I only beg you to take my card in as I say, and show it to everyone in all your household.'

Ionê hesitated. No harm in taking it, after

all ; indeed, till Mr. Hayward had seen it, she hardly knew what to do. But she wasn't going to leave the strange woman out there alone, unwatched and unguarded.

‘Blackbird!’ she called aloud, ‘just come out here a minute. . . .’ Then, in a whisper : ‘Look here, stand there, and keep an eye on this dreadful woman. Don’t let her come in. If she tries to pass you, throw your arms round her at once, and cling to her for dear life, and scream out at the top of your voice for Owen.’

Poor Blackbird, somewhat startled by these strange directions, took her place timidly where she was told, and kept her own eyes fixed on the large-eyed woman. Mesmeric, she fancied, the kind of person to send you into a sleep, a delicious long sleep where no Greek verbs would trouble your brain, no dreams disturb you. But Ionê, tripping scornfully in, carried the card in her hand to Mr. Hayward’s bedside, and

held it before him without a word, to pass his own judgment on it.

A wan smile came over the sick man's pale face.

'What? Olga, dear Olga!' he said, like one pleased and comforted. 'Show her in, Ioncê.'

'But she's a Russian spy,' Ioncê objected imprudently.

Mr. Hayward looked up at her with a white face of horror.

'What do *you* know about all this?' he asked sternly. 'This is treason. This is betrayal.'

Poor Ioncê! The words came upon her like a shock of cold water. She had been thinking only of protecting him; and *this* was how he repaid her. But even so, she remembered first her duty to Owen.

'*He* never told me,' she said proudly. '*He* never betrayed you. You betrayed yourself. I found it out, all by guess-work, that first night in Morocco.'

Mr. Hayward ran over with his glance that pretty chestnut hair, those merry, frank eyes, and groaned inwardly, audibly. He had let out his secret, then, himself to babes and sucklings. He had betrayed his own cause to a girl, a woman.

‘Well, I’ll hear more of this some other day,’ he murmured, after a short pause. ‘It’s all terrible, terrible! Meanwhile, show her in. I should like to see Olga.’

Ionê, all trepidation, went out and fetched the spy in. Madame Mireff, without a word, took the master’s hand in hers and pressed it warmly. Tears stood in both their eyes. What it all meant, Ionê knew not. But she could see at a glance both were deeply affected. And even when they began to speak she couldn’t make out a word, for it was all in Russian.

‘A bloodvessel, they tell me, dear friend,’ Madame whispered, leaning over him.

Prince Ruric Brassoff sighed.

‘A bloodvessel!’ he answered with intense scorn. ‘If that were all, Olga, it could soon be mended. No; ruin—betrayal—treason—despair—my life - work spoilt, my dearest plans shattered!’

Olga Mireff clasped her hands in silent awe and alarm.

‘Not Sergius Selistoff’s son!’ she cried.

The despairing Nihilist gave a nod of assent.

‘Yes, Sergius Selistoff’s son,’ he answered. ‘In love with a woman.’

‘And he refuses to go?’ Madame asked warmly.

‘And he refuses to go,’ Ruric Brassoff repeated in a dreamy voice. ‘He refuses to go. Says his conscience prevents him.’

‘Has he told *her*?’ Madame gasped out.

‘I don’t know. She swears not. And I think she speaks the truth. That’s she that stands there by the bed beside you.’

Madame took a good stare at her. Ionê

knew they were talking of her, though she couldn't make out the words, and she winced internally. But she smiled none the less her sunny Greek smile, and tried to seem as unconcerned as if they were discussing the weather.

'A fine girl,' Madame murmured, after surveying her close. 'Free, bold, Slavonic. The girl who crossed Morocco on horseback like a man. Greek, if I recollect. The right sort, too. Fearless, unconventional, independent, Hellenic. Good stuff for our work. She ought to be one of us.'

'She has ruined us!' Ruric Brassoﬀ cried. 'And yet, for Owen's sake—Olga, it sounds strange—I tell you, I love her.'

'Couldn't we win her over?' Madame faltered.

The chief shook his head.

'No, impossible,' he replied. 'Olga, all that's a closed book for ever. I'm a ruin, a wreck; my life is cut from under me. I've

no heart to begin again. I risked all on one throw, and the dice have gone against me. . . . Russia isn't lost. She will yet be free. But others will free her, not I. My work is finished.'

He threw his head back on the pillow. He was deadly pale now. Ionê saw something had moved him deeply. She lifted his head without a word, and gave him some brandy. It seemed to revive him. He held her hand and pressed it. Madame Mireff took the other. He pressed hers too in return.

'Dear Olga! dear Ionê!' he murmured aloud, in English.

And so they three remained there together for half an hour upon the bed, hand-in-hand, in mute sympathy—Ionê and the 'dreadful man,' the Russian spy and the chief of the Nihilists.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RULE OF THE ORDER.

FOR the rest of that week, Olga Mireff came daily and watched by Ruric Brassoﬀ's bedside. As usual, her natural charm of manner and her magnetic attractiveness soon succeeded in overcoming all suspicious fears on the part of the little community.

Madame grew quite fond of Ionê, and Ionê of her ; while Sacha, when once she had discovered the Czar's spy was a friend in disguise, could have done anything for her as one of ' dear Mr. Hayward's ' admirers. Before the end of the week, though no secrets were told, no criminating word overtly spoken between them, they had all arrived at a

tacit understanding with one another as to their common acquaintance. Madame Mireff in particular felt dimly in her own heart that Sacha and Ionê were fully aware of Mr. Hayward's being a Russian and a Nihilist, though they didn't specifically identify him with Prince Ruric Brassoﬀ. And as Ionê was always kindness itself to Madame, now she knew her for one of Mr. Hayward's friends, and vaguely suspected her of being a Nihilist too, Madame Mireff got on with her as she always got on with everybody, after the first flush of prejudice against the 'Russian spy' had had time to wear off, and the real woman had asserted herself in all her womanly intensity.

As for Mr. Hayward and Ionê, they had had things out, too, between themselves meanwhile. And Ionê had made Mr. Hayward see that to *her*, at least, Owen had never betrayed him. She told that unhappy revolutionist everything, from the moment

when she first said to Owen at Ain-Essa, 'The man's a Russian!' to the moment when, on the summit of the down at Moor Hill, she blurted out her intuitive guess, 'You've promised that horrid Nihilist man to blow up the Czar for him.' She made it all quite clear to him how Owen at first had tried to avoid her; how pure chance had thrown them together again, the second night at Beni-Mengella; how she herself had made the arrangement to go and live with Sacha; how Owen had fought against his love, while she, recognising it, had brought her woman's wits to fight on its side against him; and how she had conquered in the end, only by surprising and telling out his secret. All this Ionê told, as only Ionê could tell it, with perfect girlish modesty and perfect womanly frankness; so that Mr. Hayward at the end couldn't find it in his heart to say a word of reproach or of anger against her.

‘*Tout savoir,*’ says the wise French proverb, ‘*c’est tout pardonner.*’ And if Mr. Hayward didn’t quite forgive all—that were too much to ask—at least he understood it and in great part condoned it.

One day towards the end of the week, however, a ring came at the bell, and Ionê went out to the door to answer it.

‘Telegram for Madame Mireff,’ the boy said. ‘Sent on from the Mettropol.’

Ionê carried it in. Madame was seated by Mr. Hayward’s bedside, with that rapt expression of joy Ionê had often noted on her speaking features. It seemed to do her good just to be near Ruric Brassoif—just to hold his thin hand, just to watch his sad countenance. She tore it open carelessly.

‘From Lord Caistor, no doubt,’ she said. ‘He’s so anxious for me to go down for their house-party to Sherringham.’

But even as she read it, a dark shade passed over her face.

‘It’s hard for a man to serve two masters,’ she said in Russian, as she passed it across with a sigh to Ruric Brassoﬀ. ‘How much harder, then, for a woman!’

The invalid took it and read in French :

‘Return at once to Petersburg. Most important news. Can’t trust post. No delay. —ALEXIS SELISTOFF.’

He drew a deep sigh.

‘You must go, Olga,’ he said in Russian. ‘This may bode ill for the Cause. We must know what it means, at any rate. Though it’s hard, very hard. I’d give anything to have you with me in this my hour of darkness.’

Madame Mireﬀ rose at once, and sent Blackbird out for a Continental Bradshaw. In half an hour’s time she was packing her things in her own room at the Métropole. And by eight that night she was at Charing Cross, registering her luggage through *viâ*

Ostend, Berlin, and Eydtkuhnen to St. Petersburg.

‘Madame Mireff—the Russian spy,’ passengers whispered to one another, nudging mysteriously as she passed. ‘Recalled post-haste to headquarters, no doubt. Heard at the Métropole to-day she was sent for by the Czar at a moment’s notice.’

Not that Madame Mireff herself had ever said so. The unaccredited agent disclaimed officialdom even more strenuously than she would have disclaimed the faintest suggestion of Nihilism. But when once you’ve given a lady the character of a Russian political agent, she can’t move hand or foot without her reasons being suspected. She can’t call on a friend without everybody’s discovering in it some deep and insidious political import. Madame Mireff had left hurriedly for Russia that day; so the inference was the Czar had need of her.

It was a cold journey, that bitter January

weather, with the snow lying thick on the ground all through those vast level flats of the Baltic coast, past Berlin, and Marienburg, and Eydtkuhnen, to St. Petersburg. But Madame Mireff travelled on, day and night, unwearied, in spite of frost and snow, never resting for a moment till she reached her own house in the Russian capital. And she hadn't been home half an hour to warm herself before she drove round in her sleigh to the Third Section, where, still chilled from her journey, she was ushered up at once by an obsequious orderly into General Selistoff's cabinet.

The General shook hands with her warmly, almost affectionately.

'Hé bien, Madame,' he said, sitting down again, and twirling his gray moustache between one bronzed finger and thumb, 'how about Ruric Brassoﬀ?'

Madame repressed a nascent start with no small effort. It was a critical moment. Was

there some traitor in the camp? Had Owen let slip some unguarded phrase? Had Ionê—but no. She recovered her self-possession almost before she had lost it. This was a life and death matter for her, for Russia, and for Ruric Brassoff.

‘Not a trace of him,’ she answered stoutly, in her most matter-of-fact tone. ‘Not a sign of him anywhere. Though I’ve hunted high and low, I can learn nothing of his movements. I’ve mixed much with young men in England—hot-headed Radical young men—Cunninghame Graham and his kind, the sort of young firebrands who know Stepniak and Lavroff and Krapotkine and their like, and the openly avowed Nihilists of London or Paris—little idiots who talk foolishly, publicly, freely of the most secret designs; and many of them have confided in me; but I can’t get hold of anything solid or definite about the creature Brassoff. He’s in England, that’s all I know, for letters arrive from

him, and answers come within one post. But more than that, not a soul I meet can tell me. He must live underground, like a mole, they say, for no one ever sees him.'

General Selistoff eyed her hard. She quailed before his scrutiny.

'Yes, he's in England,' the bureaucrat answered, 'that's certain; and it's curious, *chère dame*, that with your intimate opportunities of knowing English interiors you can't track him down! It ought to be possible. But there, that country has no police; its *état civil* is the most backward in Europe. One thing alone we know: he still lives, he still writes, he still pulls all the wires, he still directs everything.'

'It's generally believed,' Madame went on, growing less nervous as she proceeded, 'that he's one of the group who compile those disgraceful and slanderous articles against Russia in the *Fortnightly Review*, signed E. B. Lanin. There's no such person,

of course ; Lanin's a mere pseudonym ; and it covers, like charity, a multitude of writers. You must have noticed the articles, no doubt ; your attention would be called to them by the official censors.'

General Selistoff nodded, and drummed with one hand on the desk before him.

'I've seen them,' he made answer. 'Most abominable exposures. We blacked them all out in every copy that entered the country. And the worst of it all is, every word of it was true, too. The reptiles wrote with perfect knowledge, and with studied coolness and moderation of tone. I suspected Brassoﬀ's hand in more than one of the vile libels. There were facts in them that could hardly have come from anyone else than him. But this is pure guesswork ; why haven't you *found out* ? You know the editor ?'

Madame Mireff smiled a most diplomatic smile.

‘Well, yes,’ she said, ‘I know him; but not from *him*. Oh, impossible! No use trying there. Incorruptible! incorruptible!’

And she went on to detail at full length all the houses she had visited, all the inquiries she had made, all the wiles she had used, and how fruitless, after all, had been her diligent search after Ruric Brassoff.

‘Well, but those children?’ the General asked after awhile, with an ugly scowl on his face. ‘Those children I asked you to track down, you remember—my unworthy brother’s son and daughter? How have you done in the search for them?’

‘Equally vain,’ Madame answered. ‘Well hidden away from sight. Not a trace to be found of them anywhere in England.’

General Selistoff leaned back in his swinging chair, puckered his brows, and looked sternly at her.

‘But there is in Russia,’ he said, crossing his arms, with an air of savage triumph;

‘and *that’s* what I sent for you all the way to Petersburg for.’

Madame’s heart sank within her in an agony of terror. What on earth could this forebode? Had he tracked them himself? Must she be driven, after all, to aid him in hunting down Owen and Sacha?

For even if Owen was a traitor to the Cause, he was Ruric Brassoﬀ’s friend; and as to Sacha, Olga Mireﬀ had learned by now to love her dearly.

The General turned to a pigeon-hole in the desk by his side, and drew out a bundle of papers neatly bound and docketed.

‘See here,’ he began slowly. ‘We arrested last week, in a suspected house at Kieﬀ, one Basil Ossinsky, a chief of the propaganda among the students of the University. We had known him for long as a most doubtful character. In his papers we found a letter from London, in cipher as usual, which I’ll trouble you to look at. You will note at

once, as you know the man's signature, that it's in Ruric Brassoﬀ's handwriting.'

Madame took the inculcated document, and with difficulty avoided a gasp of surprise—for she read it at a glance—and it would have been death to her, or what was worse than death, detection, if she had let Alexis Selistoff see she could read at sight the Nihilist cipher.

The General fished out a few more letters from his desk in the same well-known hand.

'Now, the point of all these,' he said, fingering them lovingly, 'is simply this: They show—what I could hardly have otherwise believed—that it's that incarnate devil, Brassoﬀ himself, who has taken charge of my own brother's son and daughter, these degenerate Selistoffs. They further show that he's training that young fiend, in England or elsewhere, for some diabolical scheme, not fully disclosed, against the life and throne of our beloved Emperor. They

show that he has long drawn upon his ignorant or venomous fellow-conspirators in Russia for funds to carry out this abominable project. They show that the scheme of the proposed crime was known in full detail to no more than four persons—Ruric Brassoﬀ himself, Basil Ossinsky, and two others, unnamed, who are indicated, like the rest of the crew, by numbers only. But the devil of it all is, we've got the general idea of the scheme alone ; for the assumed name and present address of young Selistoff, upon which all depends, was separately enclosed in a sealed envelope, not to be opened on any account except on the occurrence of a certain contingency ; and this envelope, unfortunately, the man has managed to conceal ; or, indeed, as we incline to believe, he has actually swallowed it.'

Madame Mireﬀ breathed hard.

'And what was that contingency?' she asked, in almost tremulous trepidation.

‘Why, it was to be opened in case the young criminal, Sergius Selistoff, after having been trained for the purpose on Nihilist money, and inspired to the utmost by Nihilist friends, should suffer in the end from qualms of conscience—should refuse at the last moment to carry out the terms of his infamous bargain. Supposing that contingency to occur, it became the sworn duty of the three confidants of Ruric Brassoff’s secret to break the sealed envelopes and disclose Sergius Selistoff’s assumed name and identity. And they were further bound by a solemn oath, all three of them alike, with Ruric Brassoff as well, and the whole conspiracy at their backs, to hound down that young rascal to his death, by fire, water, or dynamite, and never to rest for a moment till they or he were dead, in the effort to punish him for his breach of discipline.’

Madame Mireff’s blood ran cold.

‘I see,’ she said faintly. ‘They’re dreadful

people, these Nihilists. No faith, no honour! The sort of things they do really frighten and appal one.'

General Selistoff leaned back and twirled his gray moustache with those bronzed fingers once more. As a military martinet, he almost sympathized himself with this bloodthirsty regulation.

'Well, in politics,' he said slowly, 'we can none of us afford to be over-particular about the choice of our means. Politics, as I've often said, have a morality of their own. I don't blame people for trying to enforce order in their own ranks. It's just what we do ourselves. . . . I shan't mind, though, if only we can catch this young Sergius Selistoff. . . . As a Russian subject, we ought to be able to get hold of him somehow. Extradition, no doubt, on a charge of common conspiracy, would succeed in doing it. It's a very good clue. We must follow it up incessantly.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

SHADOWS OF COMING EVIL.

IN England, meanwhile, Mr. Hayward grew slowly better. In spite of the great weight on his mind—a weight of despair and of doubt for the future which he didn't attempt to conceal—his health improved by degrees under Sacha's and Ionê's careful nursing. Blackbird, indeed, sometimes soothed him with congenial pessimism. There were no fresh green laurel-leaves now for her to pursue her chemical investigations upon; so the poor child turned her energies (such as they were) to the equally congenial task of suggesting to Mr. Hayward the immense

advantages of annihilation over continued existence.

‘If only you could die,’ she said to him more than once, ‘how happy you would be! And how happy I would be if only I could go with you!’

Notwithstanding these gloomy vaticinations, however, Mr. Hayward, strange to say, got gradually better. He was even carried out into the drawing-room, where Blackbird played and sang to him sweet songs of despair, and where Trevor Gardener and Henley Stokes were in time permitted to pay their respects to the mysterious stranger. Day by day his strength returned, though his cheeks were now pale and his eyes horribly sunken. It was clear the disappointment had shaken the foundations of the man’s very being, both bodily and spiritual. His aim in life was gone. He had nothing to do now but brood over his lost hopes, and face the problem of the future for Owen Cazalet.

How serious that problem was he alone had any conception. He had woven a cunning plot against Owen's life, and now that he loved him well, and fain would save him, why, the plot would go on by itself in spite of him.

As he grew stronger he seemed to lean more and more every day for support on Ionê Dracopoli. 'Dear Ionê,' he called her; and Ionê herself, now that her native charm had conquered so much initial prejudice and such obvious disinclination, was ready to his beck and call whenever he wanted to move his chair, or to draw nearer the fire, or to sit in the rare winter sun, or to lie down at full length on the sofa by the mantelpiece. She could read to him, too, in French or German; and Mr. Hayward, who, like most other Continentals, cared little for English books, was soothed by her correct accent and her easy, fluent utterance. Often he grasped her hand fondly as she led him into his room

at nights, and leaning over to kiss it with his stately old-fashioned courtesy, he murmured more than once, with a very deep-drawn sigh :

‘ Ah, Ionê, if ever our Owen could have married at all, you’re just the sort of girl I should have wished him to marry. . . . If only he’d been mine and his own, that is to say ; if only he’d been mine and his own—not Russia’s !’

Ionê noticed, however, that he always spoke thus in the past tense, as of set purpose—as if Owen’s life and his own had been cut short abruptly.

At last he was convalescent—as much as ever he could hope to be, he said bitterly to Ionê, for he never expected to be happy or bright again now ; all *that* was done with, all *that* was cut from under him. But he was well enough, anyhow, to move, and go off on his own account. And go off he would, alone ; for he had to make new plans, as

things stood at present—serious plans, difficult plans, for Owen's future.

And Owen's future, indeed, had been most seriously upset; for the appointment had come from Lord Caistor, as Madame Mireff anticipated, and Owen, feeling it impossible now ever to take it up, had promptly replied by refusing it and withdrawing his name from the list of candidates for the diplomatic service. Another man had been substituted for him, so *that* chance was gone for ever; indeed, Owen knew he must now earn his own livelihood somehow in a far humbler sphere. Luxuries like the Foreign Office posts were no longer for him. It was a question henceforth of eighty pounds a year and a humble clerkship. So he was looking about, vaguely, for something to do, though the awful weight of the despair he had brought on his venerated friend bowed him down to the very ground with pain and sorrow.

His plans were cut short, however, by a mysterious occurrence.

One morning suddenly, as they sat in the kitchen together for company, Sacha engaged in sketching Mr. Hayward's profile, and Ionê bustling about with a chicken for dinner, Mr. Hayward looked up as with an inspiration, and said in a very quiet tone :

‘ I feel much better to-day. I think this afternoon I shall go off to the country.’

Both Sacha and Ionê gave a quick start of astonishment.

‘ To the country, Mr. Hayward !’ Ionê cried. ‘ Oh, what for, you dear old thing ? Just at the very minute, too, we were beginning to think we were really some kind of use and comfort to you.’

Mr. Hayward smiled sadly.

‘ Perhaps I'm getting too fond of you all,’ he answered, with a faint effort at lightness. But it was lightness of a grave and very pensive sort. ‘ Perhaps I'm beginning to

regret my bachelorhood and my loneliness. Perhaps it makes me think I've done wrong, for my own happiness, to have remained celibate as I did, for an abstract principle's sake, instead of surrounding myself with friends, wife, children, family—and bringing up two dear daughters like you and Sacha.'

'No, no,' Sacha said quietly, with that deep Slavonic enthusiasm of hers. 'You chose the better part, Mr. Hayward, and it shall not be taken away from you. Though your plans have failed, you have at least the glory and the recompense of knowing you have lived and suffered for them.'

Ionê felt in her heart *she* couldn't have spoken like that; but she did what she could. She took the unhappy man's hand in her own, and stroked it tenderly, as she said, with almost filial affection:

'But you won't go away from us so suddenly or so soon, dear Mr. Hayward!'

Mr. Hayward laid one caressing palm on

the crisp chestnut curls. Olga Mireff would have given her right hand for that fatherly caress.

‘Yes, my child,’ he said softly, in a tone of infinite regret. ‘I’ve many things to arrange. I must think out a new life for myself—and Owen.’

‘Why not think it out here?’ Ionê asked boldly.

Mr. Hayward shook his head.

‘You don’t understand these things, dear daughterkin,’ he answered, still fondling those soft curls, but with a very pained look. ‘Impossible, impossible! I must go down into the country for awhile. Rest—peace—change—leisure. I must tear myself away from you all. I must put space between us. Here, with *you* by my side, I can’t make up my mind to what is after all inevitable.’

A vague foreboding of evil seized Ionê’s soul. A lump rose in her throat. Till that moment she had supposed all was really over.

The crisis was past ; Owen had told him the worst ; Mr. Hayward had had his bad half-hour by himself, and had happily outlived it. They might begin to think by this time they had turned the corner. They might begin to hope at last for a prosperous voyage in quieter waters.

But now, this mysterious remark of Mr. Hayward's set Ionê trembling. Profound anxiety seized her. What on earth could it be that he couldn't bring himself to do while she and Sacha were beside him ? Was some terrible penalty attached, then, to Owen's defection ? Could these Nihilists mean—but no ! that dear gentle old man could never dream of such wickedness ! He loved Owen so much—you could see that at a glance. He was disappointed, crushed, broken, but in no way angry.

Indeed, as Ionê had noticed from the first moment to the last, since he came to the flat, Mr. Hayward's manner to Owen had been

tenderly affectionate. No father could have spoken with more gentleness and love to an erring child ; no mother could have borne a cruel disappointment more bravely or more patiently.

That very afternoon, however, true to his word, Mr. Hayward went away without further warning. Ionê helped him pack his portmanteau. As he talked to her meanwhile, the vague presentiment of coming evil in the girl's frightened soul grew deeper and deeper. Gradually it dawned upon her that their troubles, far from being finished, were hardly half-way through. Mr. Hayward's curious reticence struck terror even into that joyous and exuberant nature. Where would he stay ? Well, as yet, he said, he really didn't know. He was going away somewhere—in the country—indefinite. He must look about for a place that would suit his purpose. What purpose ? Ah, so far, he could hardly say. It must depend upon

chance, upon suggestion, upon circumstances. But when his portmanteau was packed, he seized Ionê's hand in a sort of transport, and pressed it hard between his own.

'My child,' he cried in a broken voice, giving way all at once, 'oh, my child, my dear daughter, I thank you so much for your goodness, your sympathy. You've been kind to a wounded soul. You've been tender to a bruised reed. Your smile has been sunshine to me in the wreck of my life, my hopes, my day-dream. How can I repay you thus? It goes to my heart to think I must requite you so cruelly.'

The lump rose in Ionê's throat once more. What on earth could he mean by it?

'Requite me? How? Why?' she asked, with a terrible sinking.

Mr. Hayward's voice quivered.

'Never mind, dear daughter,' he said, and he kissed her white forehead. 'I've loved Owen well, and you too, very dearly—at

first for Owen's sake, but now for your own also, and for your loving kindness. But I have no choice in this affair. I'm not my own master. Others are more bound to it than even I. . . . I'll spare him all I can. . . . I'll try to make it easy for him.'

In some dim, despairing way Ionê half guessed what he meant.

'Then, it's not all over yet?' she cried, drawing back with a look of horror.

'All over!' the Nihilist Chief answered in a tone of the utmost despair. 'All over, my dearest daughter? Oh, you can't mean that! Why, it's only beginning!'

And seizing her plump face between his two hands, and bending down to kiss her lips with one fervent kiss, he rushed out wildly into the hall, and downstairs to the hansom, not even daring to say good-bye to Owen and Sacha.

Ionê burst into tears and hurried back to her own bedroom.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOOD-BYE.

AFTER Mr. Hayward's hurried departure, a period of dulness brooded over the flat. The old excitement of his illness was over for the moment ; and the new excitement, at which he had hinted so strangely and mysteriously to Ionê, hadn't yet come on. So the members of the phalanstery mooned listlessly about at their daily work. Sacha painted without spirit ; Blackbird composed without inspiration ; Ionê mixed puddings without a touch of the divine afflatus of heaven-born cookery. She hardly even dared to tell Owen himself what Mr. Hayward had said to her. She

locked it all up, terrified, in the recesses of her bosom.

Owen's return to Moor Hill, too, left the flat all the lonelier. He had no cause to remain any longer in London as things now went; he didn't want to sponge on Sacha and the girls, though, to be sure, the alternative was sponging on Aunt Julia. But the Red Cottage had always seemed to him so much of a home that he felt less like an intruder there than in Sacha's chambers. So to Moor Hill he retired for the present, deeply engaged in thought as to where to turn and how to look about him at this crisis for an honest livelihood.

The difficulty, indeed, was great and pressing. Honest livelihoods are scarce in this crowded mart of ours. And Owen had received no special or technical training. Having no University degree, the sordid shift of schoolmastering—the last refuge of the destitute—was closed against him. He

waited and wondered what course to pursue. To say the truth, the diplomatic service is so gentlemanly and so distinguished a pursuit that preparation for it seemed to have shut all other doors against him.

He had not long to wait, however. On the fourth morning after his return to Moor Hill the post brought him a letter in a well-known handwriting. Owen tore it open with impatience. His respect and veneration for Mr. Hayward were still so intense that he read his guardian's letters with positive reverence. This one contained two distinct enclosures. The first was a formal note, with nothing compromising in it of any sort, dated from a little village up the river beyond Oxford, and inviting Owen to run down there for a week's rest and a little boating. (Strange season for boating, Owen thought to himself parenthetically.) They could talk over the subject of his future together, the letter said, not unkindly, after the change of plans

necessitated by his determination not on any terms to accept the Vienna appointment.

The second note, marked 'Strictly private,' was of a very different tenor :

'MY DEAR OWEN,

'Both as your guardian and as your chief, I ask you—nay, I order you—to come down here at once to the lodgings I am staying in. I don't attempt to conceal from you the gravity of the circumstances. This crisis is a serious one. Further particulars you will learn from me immediately on your arrival. Meanwhile, show the present letter to nobody on any account—above all, not to Ionê. Leave the other one, which accompanies it, and which is sent as a blind, openly displayed on your study table ; but bring this with you, and return it to me here. I will then destroy it myself, in order that I may make sure it has been really got rid of.

Come without fail by to-morrow evening, and say nothing to either Miss Cazalet, Sacha, Ionê, or Blackbird about this matter. You may tell your aunt casually, if you like, you're coming down here to me; but I advise you not to go near Victoria Street in the present juncture. My boy, my boy, I would have spared you if I could; but I can't—oh, I can't! I'm utterly powerless.

‘ In profound distress, your ever affectionate and heart-broken guardian,

‘ LAMBERT HAYWARD.’

Owen turned the letter over with a dismal foreboding of evil. He knew no small misfortune could make Mr. Hayward write with so much gravity as that. Some terrible necessity must be spurring him on.

Still, Owen's sense of discipline and obedience was as implicit as ever—or nearly as implicit. Without a moment's delay he

handed Aunt Julia the letter intended for the public eye.

‘I must go down to him, of course,’ he said, suppressing his alarm. ‘He’s immensely disappointed about my giving up Vienna—on conscientious grounds, which I haven’t fully explained to you—and I must go at once and talk things over in full with him. Poor dear Mr. Hayward! He looked so weak and ill when he left London the other day that I shall be glad to get down with him and see if he wants any further nursing.’

Aunt Julia acquiesced.

That phrase ‘conscientious grounds’ had a mollifying effect upon her. It was a shibboleth, indeed, which Aunt Julia understood, and which appealed to her as an outward and visible sign of the very best principles.

‘You should go, dear,’ she said, the unwonted ‘dear’ being extorted from her in token of complete approval. ‘To visit the poor man in his sickness—especially after all

his marked kindness to you in the past—is a Christian duty.’

Owen rose from the breakfast-table as soon as he was finished, and packed his portmanteau. It was a little difficult to do, for his arm was sprained—he had hurt it badly two days before in one of his athletic bouts ; but he went through with the task manfully. Then he started up to town by an early train, though he didn’t mean to reach Oxfordshire till the winter evening.

His sense of discipline, I said, was *almost*—but not quite—as implicit as ever ; for when he got to Victoria he didn’t drive straight across town to Paddington, as one might naturally have expected ; he put his portmanteau in the cloak-room instead, and walked with a burning heart down the street to Sacha’s. That was against orders, to be sure ; but the crisis was so grave ! Instinctively Owen felt he might never again see Ionê in this world ; and he couldn’t go to his

grave, if his grave it must be, without saying good-bye to her

Even so, however, he was faithful in essentials to Mr. Hayward. He saw Ionê in the drawing-room for ten minutes alone before he left the flat ; but he never told her a word of where he was going, or what Mr. Hayward had written to him. He merely mentioned offhand, in a very careless tone, that he was on his way down to Oxfordshire to stop with Mr. Hayward and talk things over. Something must be done, of course, about his future life—something about the repayment of all the money spent upon him.

So Owen, faltering.

But Ionê, for her part, read the truth more deeply. She clung about him, like one panic-stricken, and held him tight, and wept over him. She knew what it all meant, she was sure, though but very vaguely. Mr. Hayward's own hints had told her far too much.

‘My darling!’ she cried in terror, ‘my darling! you will never come back to me!’

Owen, holding his wounded right arm away from her, soothed her tenderly with his left.

‘Ionê,’ he said, bending low to her, ‘if I never come back, I shall have known at least the best thing on this earth—to love, and be loved by, a pure, good woman. I shan’t have missed in life what life has best worth giving.’

The poor girl clung to him tighter still.

‘Oh, how cruel!’ she cried through her tears. ‘Think of his dragging you away from me like this! And I nursed him so tenderly! Why, Owen, if only I’d known it, I’d have wished him dead instead a thousand times over. If I’d imagined he’d be so wicked, I almost think I could have poisoned him.’

Owen unwound her arms gently.

‘I must go soon,’ he said; ‘I mustn’t stop; and, Ionê, for my sake, you won’t let it be seen you suspect or expect anything?’

‘I can’t help it!’ Ionê exclaimed, breaking down once more and sobbing. ‘How can I help it, darling? How can I help it? I *can’t* let you go! I must tell the police! I must rouse all the world! I must come after you and prevent him!’

Shame made Owen’s face red. He took her hand very firmly.

‘My child,’ he said, looking reproachfully at her, like a Nihilist that he was, ‘I’ve disobeyed orders in coming to see you at all, and I disobeyed them because I said to myself: “I can’t go without at least kissing her dear lips once more and saying good-bye, if good-bye it must be, to her. And I’ll risk the disobedience, because I know she’s brave, and she won’t break down, or stop me, or betray

me. I'll show Mr. Hayward a woman's love doesn't always make one lose all sense of discipline. I'll say good-bye to her like a man, and then obey my marching orders. . . . Ionê, are you going to make me regret my decision ?'

Ionê stood up and faced him. Those cheeks, once so ruddy, were pale as a ghost. But she answered him firmly, none the less.

'No, Owen, no. Go, if you feel you must. But, my darling, my darling, if you never come back, I shall die for your sake. I shall kill myself and follow you !'

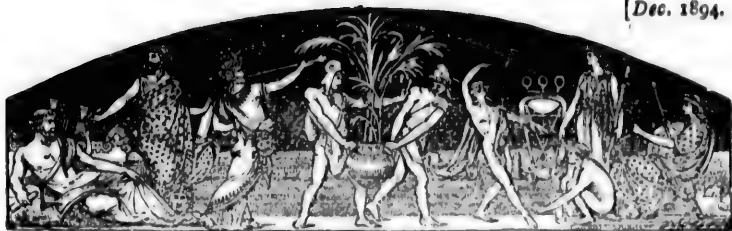
'One thing more,' Owen added. 'I don't know what all this means. I go under sealed orders, but if I die—mind—not a word of suspicion against Mr. Hayward ! I couldn't bear *that* ! Promise me, darling, promise me !'

Ionê's voice was choked with tears, but, as well as she could, she sobbed out :

‘ I promise you !’

Then she flung herself upon his neck, like a child on its mother’s, and cried long and silently.

END OF VOL. II.



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